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INDUSTRIAL WORKER

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Workers at the I-07 conference of revolutionary syndicalists marched on May Day in Paris, France. See the IWW ISC conference report on page 16 and extensive May Day coverage on pages 6 to 9.

Photo by Ronny Stansert.

UK bosses deny minority women promotions,

Britain's Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) found that Bangladeshi, Pakistani and black Caribbean women have a harder time getting jobs and promotions than white women or men, despite their rising academic scores and improved education and qualifications.

"Growing numbers of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women want to move on and move up. It is critical for our future that they are given the opportunity to do so," said the report. In the 20 years from 2001 onward, ethnic minorities will make up 70 per cent of new population growth in the United Kingdom. The Commission for Racial Equality claims that in just five years, only 20 per cent of the workforce will be white, able-bodied, male and under 45—the profile that remains the stereotype of the British workforce in the public mind.

"Given the chronic skills shortages holding back our economy, it makes no economic or business sense for whole groups of well-qualified individuals who want to work to remain outside the labour market or to be stuck in low-grade jobs with poor pay and prospects," said the report. The authors of the report

are advocating for these young women's right to equal opportunity, lauding the economic and social benefits of equality to the workers, "their families and our communities." One in every five children living in poverty in Britain is from an ethnic minority community.

The popular stereotype of Muslim women being held back by their culture from entering the workplace is countered by the report's interviews with ambitious young Muslim women who have the support of their families to get jobs. Not only do they want to work, they want affordable daycare for children, which would enable them to get the education and hold the jobs they want.

"Many workplaces have yet to catch up with the reality of modern Britain – they need to become more 'culturally intelligent' in order to change what ethnic minority women have referred to as the 'unwritten rules,'" said the report.

As expected, the unwritten rules facing minority women include racism, sexism and anti-Muslim prejudice. However, exclusion includes not being able to participate in after-work pub traditions, being forced to wear uniforms that conform to rigid Western dress codes,

and white people's impatience and lack of confidence with accented English no matter how good it is.

Managers wield cultural power as well as boss power in the workplace, too, by showing tolerance for stereotypes and

making assumptions about women's capabilities on the basis of their home life and number of children, particularly with regard to giving promotions and other opportunities such as travel.

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Wobblies picket Circuit City to fight 3,400 firings

The Upstate New York IWW picketed the Albany, NY area's local Circuit City retail store on May Day over the company's recent layoffs of 3,400 employees.

In early April, home electronics retailer Circuit City announced an unprecedented round of layoffs, putting 3,400 workers on the street while offering these same people a chance to re-apply for their positions in 10 weeks at entry level pay. The 3,400 were at the top of the seniority list and the highest paid line staff at Circuit City.

CEO Phillip Schoonmaker, meanwhile, earns millions with bonuses and stock options.

The Upstate NY IWWs sent letters to the Circuit City plutocrat and scheduled a May Day picket at the Crossgates Commons store outside of Albany, joining with other labor rights watchdogs in a call to re-hire the 3,400 at their original



Sonya and her dog "Mo-Jo" traveled from Western Massachusetts to join the Upstate NY IWW picket in front of a Circuit City store in Albany.

pay and to boycott the chain retailer until they do so.

"Companies get rid of employees for all sorts of reasons," said branch member, Paul Poulos.

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To the editors,

The IW's international labor reporting recently has been excellent. Please keep the information flowing.

Peter King

Dear Editors,

Dallas-Fort Worth branch of the IWW (DFW-IWW) in honor of May Day hosted a picnic at Cravens Park in Arlington, Texas. Code Pink, Peaceful Vocations, North Texas for Justice and Peace, and Food Not Bombs joined the newly formed branch of the Industrial Workers of the World for food and fellowship and sharing ideas with local young people.

The DFW-IWW is bringing new vitality, spirit, ideas, and leadership to the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

In Solidarity,
Rus Frizzell, DFW-IWW

Fellow Workers,

We are now in the fifth year of the war in Iraq. This war was sold as a war for democracy. Another war, also sold as a war for democracy was the Great War—now known as World War One. John Reed, a supporter of the Industrial Workers of the World, covered that war and saw it for what it was. You can read about that in the book, *The Education of John Reed*, published by International Publishers.

Another book I want to cite about “the war to end all wars” is *The Chazon Ish: The Life and Ideals of Rabbi Avraham Yeshayah Karelitz* by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman:

“As the Russians struggled to withstand the German onslaught, they turned to Jews as likely scapegoats for their troubles. Jews were accused of aiding the enemy; scores were exiled and many died. Most vulnerable were *Rabbanim* [Rabbis] and community leaders whom the government accused of organizing their followers to commit treason.”

Many people in the IWW were jailed for opposing that war.

In solidarity and peace,
Raymond S. Solomon
Editor, Free Voices

Our Co-Editor's parting words

Mike Pesa stepping down after planned five-month stint

Fellow Workers,

When I ran for election with Peter Moore last November I committed to co-editing the Industrial Worker through the June issue (the issue you are holding in your hands) or “potentially longer.”

Given the scope of my other commitments and the fact that Peter is now confident in his ability to carry on without me, I have decided not to extend my term any further. My energies are needed elsewhere. Beginning on June 1, 2007, Peter Moore will become the sole editor of the *Industrial Worker*.

I have been thinking of how I can continue to contribute to the Industrial Worker after this transition takes place. In addition to helping out with mailings, I hope to start a new monthly column or feature, perhaps on the theme of “workers and the environment.”

I will also continue writing the ISC column.

The past five months have been a powerful experience for me that I am thankful for having the opportunity to be

able to serve the IWW in this capacity. I have been lucky to have Peter Moore as the other half of my team. Whatever disagreements we might have about the paper, he is a solid editor with a strong vision and he has the skills and leadership necessary to continue to drive the paper forward after I vacate my position. Our paper isn't perfect and Peter will still have a lot of work cut out for him, but together we have steadily built on each issue we produced.

I want to thank everyone for your support and wish the *Industrial Worker* the best of luck.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to email me at mike.pesa@gmail.com.

In solidarity,

Mike Pesa
Outgoing Co-Editor,
Industrial Worker

Industrial Worker



IWW directory

The Voice of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism

ORGANIZATION
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Chicago Couriers pickets unfair security delays

IWW campaigns for change in Chicago

By Chicago Couriers Union

On May 2, the Chicago Couriers Union (IWW) rolled up to 135 LaSalle Street with signs, fliers, and union flags for a spirited three hour information picket against the security policies of the building, which is owned by Jones Lang LaSalle.

We had previously written letters and had over 100 bike messengers sign a petition in hopes of having the policy changed and to have a messenger center installed, only to be given the run-around by building management.

In this and many other buildings downtown, bike messengers must endure humiliating and time-consuming security procedures to simply do our jobs: entering through a loading dock, leaving our bags (as if we're criminals), waiting for a freight elevator (rather than just taking passenger elevators through the lobby), and often taking abuse from security guards.

Forcing us into this mess can take 15-20 minutes, costs customers money, costs messengers money, results in a loss of productivity across the industry, and is just plain not cool.

Two messengers held the picket for its duration, and several fellow messengers, plus a member of the local IWW General Membership Branch, spent time holding signs and handing out fliers to fellow workers, employees in the building, and other passersby. The picket covered the front and back entrances, plus both entrances of the alley leading into the loading dock. Hundreds of fliers were distributed, containing information about our grievances.

Many fellow messengers who had deliveries in the building were given fliers and had a very supportive and ap-

reciative response to the union action. There was also strong support from workers inside the building, many of whom have been or will be laid off from LaSalle Bank as a result of their buyout.

"What did they do this time?" quipped one disgruntled LaSalle Bank worker.

Another worker, having been laid off last October, said of our picket, "I'm not surprised!"

During the action, union members were photographed and harassed by building security. A mysterious man snapped some photos without speaking to us, and a representative of LaSalle Bank called the police, claiming that we were blocking the front entrance, despite the fact that we were standing on the opposite side of the sidewalk. The police car rolled up... and kept going.

Greg Prather, the person in charge of the security policy, came out at one point to listen to a CCU member. He repeated the same lines from last Fall about how he was working on improving our situation and promised action. But we know that they don't take action on their own, which is why we escalated our tactics: from letters to petitions to a picket.

The CCU, like any union, succeeds and fails in proportion to the commitment of its participants. Despite the strong support from many messengers, there are still a lot of messengers who are either apathetic or hostile to the union.

The big challenge now is for us to stick to our guns and attract members through listening and responding to messengers' grievances, giving everyone a voice in the union, and other acts of solidarity within the messenger community.

Bike messengers must endure humiliating and time-consuming security procedures to simply do our jobs.



Photo by X353650.
Chicago Couriers Union picket 135 LaSalle Street against overly tight security process.

Baltimore bike shop goes union

From iww.org

All ten employees of Joe's Mt. Washington Bike Shop in Baltimore, United States, have joined the Industrial Workers of the World, organizers announced in early May.

The workers have taken these actions in order to secure and improve their jobs in what is commonly known as the "best bicycle shop" in Baltimore.

The demands by the union center largely around the lack of employee policy.

Before the union there was no system for scheduled raises, sick days or vacation policy. Decisions were the sole prerogative of the boss.

Now a reasonable consensus must be reached regarding these important factors of running a business.

"I feel a sense of empowerment," said Johnny May, one of the full time employees at Joe's Bike Shop. "The union has given me a more active role as a worker."

The Mt. Washington Bike Shop workers have chosen to affiliate with the IWW because of the organization's dedication to shop floor democracy.

"There are no professional organizers telling us what is in our best interest. Every member is an organizer, every member is a leader," said Josh Keogh, another full-time worker.

While a local small business might seem an odd place for a union, full-time worker Kris Auer makes it clear that "it is not a direct attack on the owner; it is a step toward securing my future."

Joe's will join Red Emma's, Baltimore's radical bookstore and coffee shop, as the second IWW shop in Baltimore. Both workplaces anticipate this federation of industrial democracies will grow and prosper in the near future.

Superdull union

And the new UK superunion's name will be... The Amalgamated Union. The merged union of Amicus and the Transport and General Workers Union—totaling nearly two million UK workers—selected the new name in its amalgamation notice to the British Certification Officer.

The new name has the dreary tone common enough in the UK's infamously bureaucratic mainstream trade unions. Good luck inspiring the global working class, mates!

Preamble of the IWW Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially—that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 23085, Cincinnati OH 45223, USA.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$1,000, dues are \$6 a month. If your monthly income is between \$1,000 - \$2,000, dues are \$12 a month. If your monthly income is over \$2,000 a month, dues are \$18 a month. Dues may vary in Regional Organizing Committees (Australia, Europe).

- o I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer
- o I agree to abide by the IWW constitution
- o I will study its principles and acquaint myself with its purposes.

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City, State, Zip, Country: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Membership includes a subscription to the Industrial Worker.



Workers Power

What kind of Solidarity Forever?

By Nate Holdren

There are two versions of solidarity activity: solidarity unionism and solidarity activism.

Solidarity unionism means exercising our power on the job. We organize as much as possible so we don't give our power away to lawyers, outside organizers, union staff, or anyone else. If we have to give away some power—such as when we file Unfair Labor Practice charges—it's for tactical reasons only. By getting more and more co-workers to take action based on our collective self-interests as workers we create big changes, changes in our lives on the job and changes in our co-workers by showing them our ideas in practice instead of just telling them. Solidarity unionism makes more power for ourselves, more members of our union, and more members with experience, commitment, and a vision of what the One Big Union is and should be.

Solidarity activism means showing up outside of our own jobs to help other people's struggles to defend existing conditions or defend their attempt to build something. We hand out flyers and picket outside someone else's workplace or some other place. This kind of solidarity has helped the Starbucks organizing continue and grow. There is a long and proud tradition of this kind of solidarity in our class and in our union. If solidarity activism wins better conditions for any worker anywhere then it's a good thing, morally and as a tactic. But it's not good strategy.

Without power on the shopfloor, a union will not be a fighting organization that can win gains, and it's much harder to maintain union democracy. Workers are more likely to exercise our power for something we run and control than something undemocratic and unaccountable. If power is outside the shop

floor, then the workers in the shop can be replaced. If their organization breaks down, the officials don't lose anything. This is why many of the business unions love media-heavy, corporate-style campaigns: they put the power in the hands of staff, officers, lawyers, journalists, politicians, and the well-intentioned solidarity activists who mobilize from the outside. While solidarity activism can build the skills and experience of the individuals who take part in it, it doesn't build power in the activists' workplaces. It also doesn't build the power of the workers in the shop being supported. If a campaign is won by solidarity activism, that means the power to make change does not rest on the shop floor. Solidarity activism doesn't build shop floor power because it doesn't exercise shop floor power.

Workers' power is like a muscle. My muscles have (pretty flabby) limits. By using my muscles within their limits, I get stronger. Solidarity unionism means exercising our power. We figure out what power we have and we increase it by exercising it. We exercise our power to build an organized shop and eventually an organized industry and an organized working class, which combined increases the power we have to exercise. The point isn't just to lift this weight to improve the job in the short-term, for a fair day's wages for a fair day's work. The point is how the weights get lifted and by who—by improving the job by our own action, in a way that builds organization and builds the IWW's ability to abolish the wage system. We need strategy, a plan to keep on lifting until we become able to dump the bosses off our backs.

We can only lift so much at a time, though. Every time I move I realize how there are too many boxes for me alone, so I call my friends. That's solidarity

activism. Sometimes it is tactically necessary. But our strategy should not be based on someone else constantly lifting things for us.

Imagine if my friends who helped me move stuck around forever and I never lifted anything ever again. I would get weaker and less healthy from lack of exercise. This is what the US' National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and the business unions do. They say, "Don't try to lift that, just watch me." They don't encourage us to exercise our own power, so they don't encourage us to increase our power. Sometimes they actively fight us when we try to exercise our power.

There are some fellow workers who prefer to be part of solidarity activism instead of solidarity unionism. That's their right. But solidarity unionism is the direction this union should continue to move in. Solidarity activism has a place, but a secondary one. In fact, the more we focus on exercising our power in solidarity unionism—recruiting members, getting more members organizing in more shops, increasing our ability to organize successfully—the more power we'll have when we need to do solidarity activism for our fellow workers inside and outside the union.

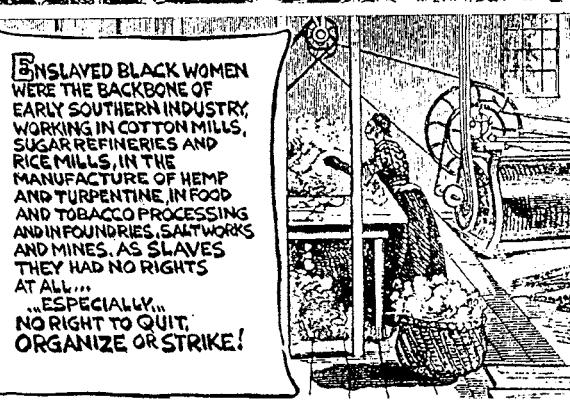
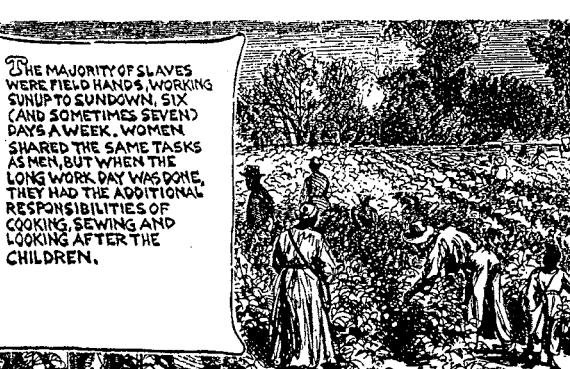
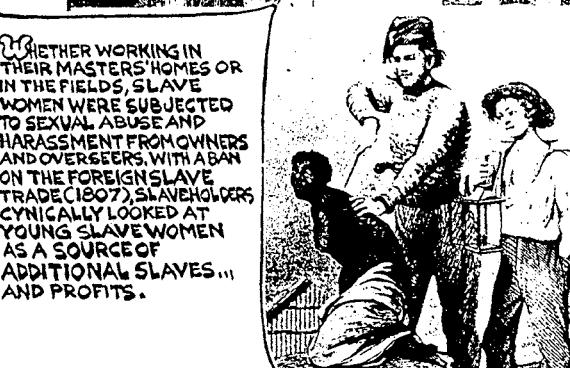
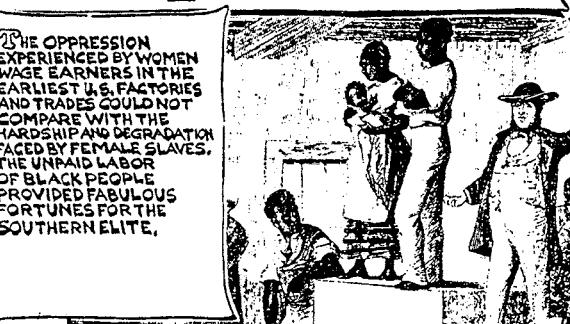
go on and on as I worked alongside a giant picture of George Bush smiling at me; I was about to lose it! I still can't quite understand how only two adults and one child can live in such a big place.

Around noon, an older Portuguese woman comes to the door, cleaning supplies in hand. "Working on May Day as well? It's a shame, isn't it?" I said to her. She smiled at me with her warm eyes and said with a sigh, "Oh, I know it." I watched as she scrubbed the floors and the ever-impressive granite countertops. She moved so fast that you could tell she had been working hard her whole life. I told her not to work too hard. She laughed and made a funny face in the direction of the homeowner.

We took a break and talked for a while—that is, until the boss lady peaked around the corner. The homeowner had been in the other room most of the day with a house decor planner complaining

WOMEN WORKERS' HISTORY

CHAPTER 7: SLAVES IN FIELD AND FACTORY



about color schemes. She would come out every so often to hurry the elderly lady along and to check how messy we were making things.

The opening line from the IWW Constitution, "The employing class and the working class have nothing in common" came to my mind. We worked overtime and everyone started to leave. I couldn't wait to leave that place. I said goodbye to my sister worker with a "Happy May Day." I still remember the smile that formed across her weathered face. So this May Day I wasn't out in the streets with my brothers and sisters but I was inside with them, keeping capital in motion, keeping the upper class comfortable.

This May Day was a great reminder of what May Day is all about. I resolved in myself to an even greater burning desire to fight and organize for our class.

violation in their layoffs by seniority.

This was part of a busy May Day and week for the Branch as they did outreach and cultural work tied to local May Day Festival events. Immediately following the Circuit City picket a version of "The Wobbly Show" centenary graphics exhibit was displayed for the Ninth Annual Hudson-Mohawk May Day Labor Festival and the exhibit was also put on display for the month at Troy's Sanctuary for Independent Media. Wobs from Albany and Cooperstown travelled to Hamilton College, Clinton, NY later in the week to lecture students on IWW history and theory. And they finished the week tabling the Anne Feeney concert in Troy, New York.

May Day on the job

By Mike Bell, IU 330

What a special day May Day is. Here is a day where as workers we are supposed to take a day off, remember the sacrifices and victories of the past and act to demonstrate workers' solidarity.

This year I could only put on my gloves and wish my fellow workers a Happy May Day! This past May Day was very different for me than the historic May Day of last year in Boston. Last year's crowds and demonstrations were this year's drills and nut drivers. This May Day, I heard the echo of past resistance and the oppression of this current system.

At a dusty two-story commercial building my fellow workers and I bend and strap conduit (electrical pipe) wire in lights, receptacles and circuits in the humid Atlanta heat. I wonder to myself how much space this building has that could be used for the needs of the people instead of some big-time investor; those

suits always come around making our work more difficult.

Around 8:30 I was shifted to another "emergency" job in a different part of the city. I looked out the window of the service van only to see no change in the traffic, workers on their way to the grind stone. We drive far off, away from the riff raff, far away from the working class part of the city, to a gated island of multi-million dollar mega-homes. What a place for me to be on May Day, I thought!

I was transferred into a different world—a different reality. We had been sent to install high-end ceiling fans to be placed in their 25-foot high ceilings. When you go into a place like that to work you are always a little on edge. The home owner is right there greeting you with a half-chagrined smile mostly to watch that you don't damage the mahogany tables and their highly-priced Amazonian wood floors. The day seemed to

go on and on as I worked alongside a giant picture of George Bush smiling at me; I was about to lose it! I still can't quite understand how only two adults and one child can live in such a big place.

Around noon, an older Portuguese woman comes to the door, cleaning supplies in hand. "Working on May Day as well? It's a shame, isn't it?" I said to her. She smiled at me with her warm eyes and said with a sigh, "Oh, I know it." I watched as she scrubbed the floors and the ever-impressive granite countertops. She moved so fast that you could tell she had been working hard her whole life. I told her not to work too hard. She laughed and made a funny face in the direction of the homeowner.

We took a break and talked for a while—that is, until the boss lady peaked around the corner. The homeowner had been in the other room most of the day with a house decor planner complaining

Upper NY IWWs picket Circuit City, call for boycott

Continued from 1

"Just think of 3,400 who thought they had a level of security. To be fired unilaterally, without any thought to the level of contribution they made over the years—we can't let corporations be the moral conscience of America," said Poulos.

IWW picketer Rochelle Semel called the Circuit City layoffs "an outrageous demonstration of corporate greed" which sets a dangerous precedent.

"Look out if they get away with it," she warned, as the layoffs are an ominous signal [that] may reverberate with the employing class, always in search

of a more diabolical way to enhance its bottom line.

As potential customers appeared at the Circuit City entrance and local radio and newspaper reporters arrived, it became evident that the general public and even other unions' members didn't understand the act of standing in solidarity with the Circuit City 3,400.

"You're getting paid, right?" one customer queried from her car window. Giovanna Lepore of the local IWW Branch explained: "I don't have to work in a place to show worker solidarity."

Peter Tsaffaras, a long-time IWW member, was struck by some of what he

saw as runaway consumer culture, shopping for the sake of shopping.

"They think they're in Disneyland," he observed of oblivious shoppers who ignored the prescient warning provided at the store's entrance. Others heeded the warning and one worker, alerted by Lepore's visit into the store (she was promptly told to leave) just prior to the start of the picket, took a general information flyer from the IWWs.

While Circuit City claims losses that the capitalist press likes to use as a justification for such savage practices, their actions may also lead to legal action. There may be an age discrimination

Solidarity Never? BC teachers' fed locks out staff

Once the darling of the Canadian labour movement for its defiance of a union-busting provincial government in 2005, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) continues to stall negotiations with its own staff union which began in September 2006.

The day after May Day, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) locked out its 40 staff, members of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union local 464 (CEP). CEP local 464 had suspended picketing on May 1, when the BCTF withdrew its labor board application to restrict picketing of its annual meeting.

"For any employer to embark on such a course of action is unthinkable and unwarranted. But for a union employer to do so, is absolutely unconscionable," said CEP local president Anita Chapman. "Now our latest attempt to rekindle the bargaining process has been met with this slap in the face."

The 120 support staff of the Teachers' Federation of Employees' Union has to date respected the CEP picket line, effectively shutting down the office.

CEP says the issues are concessions and contract-stripping that affects medical benefits (including those for retired members), overtime pay, term as opposed to permanent jobs, benefits, and a salary increase. "Although teachers in BC are the third highest paid in Canada, their administrative staff employees rank seventh in pay," said the union, which compared its salaries to those of other teachers' unions.

The BCTF said that the staff already make on average CN\$97,000, much more than the average teacher's salary of CN\$63,000, and has repeatedly denounced that staff get a retirement bonus of CN\$50,000 upon retiring after only 10 years of service. Sims said she has offered "a very fair offer" of a CN\$3,000 raise over three years and asked staff to give up compensation or lieu time for evening work.

The BCTF represents 43,000 elementary and secondary school teachers in British Columbia, Canada. Its members ratified a hard-fought five-year contract on September 8, 2006. Not

long after, the union executive's troubled negotiations with its staff union began.

Thirty-three of the staff members were recruited from the teachers' rank-and-file, with the other seven workers being lawyers, an accountant and a media relations officer. The staff union had voted 92 per cent in favor of strike action in March, but delayed actual strike action in favor of other strategies until April 26, when the BCTF executive had not budged in negotiations.

weeks, the mediator ended his involvement.

"In mediation we tabled a revised offer and the BCTF refused to counter. We question how a settlement can be reached when only one party is willing to bargain," said CEP 464 president Anita Chapman.

On April 26, the staff put up picket lines at BCTF headquarters in Vancouver. The next day, CEP proposed going to binding arbitration because "the

reason to prohibit picketing, an extremely dangerous precedent will have been set, and every employer in the province would have the ability to apply the same ruling. The BCTF will have effectively rewritten the province's labor laws for its own selfish convenience," said Chapman. Sims withdrew the application on May 1.

As of this writing, the lock-out is in its twentieth day with no end in sight. On February 28, CEP 464 sent a letter requesting support to the president of the BC Federation of Labour and to the Canadian Labour Congress. Neither has taken a public position on the dispute.

The dispute has caught the attention of 'babblers' on the progressive Canadian news web site rabble.ca. On Rabble.ca's bulletin board, comments range from defending the BCTF for its record in fighting the conservative Liberal government's attacks on public education to shock at what the BCTF is doing to its own workers.

[T]he BCTF, both the leadership and members, should be regarded as heroes by both the BC labour movement and the public. They took on Gordon Campbell's draconian bully tactics in an illegal strike that lasted three weeks—and they won some major victories in terms of limiting class size and [gaining] better working conditions," said a poster called West Coast Lefty.

"This goes beyond playing hardball. It is about union busting. It is pathetic when a union engages in union busting," said poster Scaramanga. "The BC Teachers Federation is pulling a Gordon Campbell on its own staff union with contract strips and rolling back health benefits. After years of complaining about their own contract being stripped, they do this? Disgusting."

One possible reason for the bitterness of the dispute is that the union staff charged the BCTF overtime when their members worked more than 10 hours per day during the 2005 and 2006 job actions. The issue came as a surprise to the staff negotiators.

"At no time until our bargaining began, some 15 months after the teacher strike, did we ever hear that we were to have somehow abandoned our own collective agreement and become volunteers," said a CEP bulletin.

"Jinny Sims has clearly lost her way. We were proud to stand alongside her and BC's teachers when she led them through an unprecedented strike and through a defiance of the law in defense of basic union principles in 2005. But what she now is trying to do, not only to her own workforce but to all of organized labor in BC, is abhorrent to every worker who holds a union card," said Anita Chapman. "There are not many union principles the BCTF Executive Committee has not violated."

This is the second time in 2007 that a major Canadian union has forced its staff into a strike or lock-out position. CUPE, a major Canadian public service union, demanded concessions from its staff who responded with strike action in March 2007. The CUPE staff union ratified their contract 75 per cent in favor, with 83 per cent of 750 union members voting.

Union One video project on YouTube

The Union One Video Project is posting pro-union videos on web sites such as YouTube to combat the anti-union videos being posted by the Heritage Foundation, UnionFacts.com, and others. The Union One section of YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/unionone> now has 20 pro-union videos for ready view. For more information about this project, contact David Williams, Union One, 317-698-0850.

When a union employer attempts to strip another union's contract... employers rub their hands in glee.

—Anita Chapman, president, CEP local 464

The staff union says that the Federation is vilifying its members "as greedy, lazy, and dishonest" in an effort to discredit their demands and legitimate right to collective bargaining. In a circular, the union said that the employer is taking a page from the book of its arch-enemy, the anti-union premier of BC, and setting a dangerous precedent for future bargaining not only for them, but the teachers they serve.

The Federation has demanded strips from the staff union collective agreement without any attempt to negotiate these matters —no solutions, no counters, just demands. When a union employer attempts to strip another union's contract, the founding principles of the labour movement, including the collective agreement, are under attack and are weakened. Employers rub their hands in glee.

Members, who have always been told that contract stripping is scurrilous, begin to wonder if it's okay sometimes. How are the tactics of the Federation executive any different than those of the Liberal government?

CEP 464 has taken step after step to negotiate a new contract with the BCTF. CEP 464 petitioned a mediator from the Labour Relations Board, but, after two

employer is so entrenched in its bargaining position that we believe the help of a third party is necessary."

"Binding arbitration is not a suitable replacement for free collective bargaining," replied BCTF president Jinny Sims.

The dispute has affected the BCTF's own internal democracy. The annual meeting was re-scheduled from March to May 4-6, then cancelled indefinitely by the executive.

The executive even applied to the Labour Relations Board on April 27 to prevent staff workers from picketing the meeting.

"We fully support CEP Local 464's right to strike and their right to picket their workplace but that workplace is not our membership's Annual General Meeting and we have asked the Labour Relations Board to rule on that," said BCTF president Jinny Sims. "It is regrettable that our professional staff would use that meeting to pressure our members when we believe they have no right to picket there."

CEP 464 President Anita Chapman warned that the BCTF had better think about the larger consequences of its move to restrict picketing.

"If the BCTF succeeds in arguing that financial and operational hardship is a

Govt forces CN picketers back to work

CN tries to take advantage of Teamsters raid by pushing for end to national bargaining

The Canadian Conservative government chose the economy over workers' right to free collective bargaining and forced CN Rail picketers back to work on April 18. The government rushed the law through Parliament in one day with the whole-hearted support of the opposition Liberal Party.

The law forced 2,800 CN Rail switchers and yard workers and CN management into arbitration after eight days of rotating strikes that the United Transportation Union (UTU) said were to bring CN back to the negotiating table.

The workers had voted 79 per cent against a one-year contract with CN Rail. Knowing the government's willingness to use its back-to-work bill, CN Rail chose to lock-out workers in retaliation, in effect shutting themselves down and provoking government action.

The government and business lobbyists said the health of the economy was at risk.

Statistics Canada reportedly said the February strike contributed to a decline of more than \$900 million in Canada's trade surplus that month.

Lost opportunity to protect workers

This moment was a rare opportunity to check the minority government's attack on workers. The back-to-work bill,

the first in eight years, was introduced into Parliament during the February dispute, and so it was no surprise. What was surprising was the inability of opposition parliamentarians to fight it.

Canada's labor-friendly parties, the social democratic New Democratic Party and the nationalist Bloc Québécois, attempted to block the legislation, but failed to convince the Liberals that workers' rights mattered more than the economic impact of the dispute.

The New Democratic Party was in disarray during its fight against back-to-work legislation on April 18. Its members accused its only ally in Parliament, the Bloc Québécois, of planning to vote in favor of the bill.

The NDP leader, Jack Layton, didn't participate in the debate. He, his wife and parliamentarian Olivia Chow and two other NDP parliamentarians also missed the vote that made the back-to-work bill into law.

Two Bloc Québécois parliamentarians missed the vote, too. The final vote was 195 to 71 in favor of breaking the strike with the law.

The federally appointed arbitrator, Andrew C.L. Sims, is an Alberta-based lawyer, vice-chairman of the Alberta Labour Relations Board and vice-chairman of the Canadian Industrial Relations Board. He has 90 days to make a ruling,

which should be released in the last week of July. Alberta has the toughest anti-union laws in Canada. The arbitrator will select a final offer on issues in dispute from either the UTU or CN Rail in a "winner-take-all" process.

CN Rail raised the stakes of this arbitration with a new divide-and-conquer strategy by announcing on April 16 that it wanted to negotiate regional agreements with the different "factions" of the UTU, rather than try to work out a national agreement.

"In light of the continuing internal conflicts within the UTU, CN believes it's increasingly clear that the union today is unable to deliver a national negotiated settlement that its members across Canada would ratify," said the CN statement.

The UTU negotiators responded to CN Rail's threat.

"If CN Rail is attempting to push the parties farther apart by creating fears of greater uncertainty and disruption to CN operations, it has succeeded by raising the spectre of fragmentation," said John Armstrong, UTU vice-president.

The Canadian industrial relations board has yet to rule on the certification application of the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference to represent workers who are members of UTU.

Troqueros shut down LA port on May Day

By Ernesto Nevarez, Los Angeles IWW

The grassroots labor movement has always been fueled by migrants, and the "troquero" movement in the Port of Los Angeles is no exception. Troqueros are drivers of trucks that are owned by the actual driver, a third party or by the trucking company. For over 20 years the troqueros have developed a militant infrastructure built on consensus and collective action. For the third time in the last four years, the Port of Los Angeles was severely hit by the normal 14,000 truck traffic running at only 10 per cent in the morning, rising to 33 per cent at its peak, as reported in the leading newspaper, *La Opinion*. The previous year it was a virtually complete shutdown, according to the industry journal, www.cunninghamreport.com. Over 70 workers attended a park rally/meeting and conducted an open air session on organizing.

The IWW received recognition by the migrant community and was featured by the nationwide Spanish language media as a key element in the mobilization for the "Gran boicot 2." Our union has also caught the attention of mainstream labor unions, many of which were intrigued and welcomed us into the pro-migrant worker movement, others that have learned to co-exist with us in the industry, and one that must feel threatened and has become rather paranoid.

The IWW has embedded itself as an integral force in this powerful labor movement which has the potential to choke the global economy at the ports and bring justice to all workers, all the way down the supply chain.

Solidarity actions and meetings took place in Los Angeles, Newark, Boston, and Phoenix. This May Day can only be

considered a success as it has resurrected the Los Angeles General Membership Branch of the IWW, helped a handful of us bond tightly and has also created a working network between at least five IWW General Membership Branches.

Now we must learn to harness the collective power of the thousands of troqueros in the development of the One Big Union!



Protesters in McArthur Park, Los Angeles, United States, before police attacked the crowd and media.

IWW helps open trucker center

From iww.org

Truck drivers from Ports Elizabeth and Newark, New Jersey, with the Industrial Workers of the World, opened a new drivers' education and organizing center in Elizabeth on May 1, 2007, the first of its kind in the nation.

The center is being organized to fight for and enforce the rights of rail and port truckers, and is being named in commemoration of Teamster organizer José Gilberto Soto. Soto was assassinated in El Salvador while organizing port truckers there in 2004.

Founders of the center say their goal is to educate and mobilize truckers around issues that affect their workplace and their community, including port security and environmental concerns about diesel pollution. Specifically, the center intends to apply for grants to convert trucks to run on bio-diesel fuel, as well as looking into other sustainable, green alternatives. The Elizabeth drivers' center will be represented by labor and environmental attorney David Tykulsker of Montclair, New Jersey.

Mexican unions move toward independence

By Paul Bocking

Mexico's diverse social movements are escalating protests against neoliberal programs advocated by the federal and state governments. In Mexico City, all unions and many campesino and community organizations participated in events in recognition of May 1, International Worker's Day. Multiple rallies and marches filled downtown streets with tens of thousands of unionists.

Reflecting their growth as the largest and most active faction within the Mexican labour movement, the biggest demonstration consisted of unions affiliated with the Union Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT-National Union of Workers), the Frente Sindical Mexicana (FSM-Mexican Union Front) and the democratic teacher's movement (CNTE).

The impending privatization of social security for public sector employees was a key issue. Under the new pension scheme proposed by the conservative National Action Party (PAN) government since entering office in November 2006, retirement ages will be raised and benefits will be cut in half, according to some opposition politicians and union activists. Along with the school teachers of the CNTE, the majority of unions affiliated to the UNT and the FSM are based in the public sector, including university, healthcare and electrical utility workers.

The coordination of the UNT, FSM and the CNTE in protests against the privatization of public pensions can be considered an increasing convergence of Mexico's independent unions – those not subordinated to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). During the PRI's 71-year authoritarian rule over Mexico, so-called official unions received government support and independent unions faced persecution. Since the PRI's loss of national power to the PAN in 2000, its affiliated unions have declined in significance.

Miner union leader fled to Canada

On May 1, the "official" unions held a half-hour rally in Mexico City's central square. Meanwhile, some unions traditionally associated with the PRI, including the Mexican miners and steelworkers union (SNTMMRSM), held separate

events providing further sign of rupture among the official unions.

The miner's union is embroiled in a struggle against the federal government's effort to impose a new leader to replace the current president, Napoleon Gomez Urrutia. The Mexican ministry of labour claims he stole union funds, while Urrutia's supporters argue he is under attack for supporting successful strikes against companies including Grupo Mexico, a powerful multinational copper mining corporation. Meanwhile, Urrutia has taken refuge in Vancouver,

The same day union leaders at Mexico's largest university, the UNAM, withdrew their support for a walkout. However, thousands of rank-and-file members defied the order to stay at work and blockaded all entrances to the sprawling campus. University and high school students occupied major adjacent roads. More militant unions also affiliated to the UNT or the FSM completely shut down other public universities in the city. Job actions also occurred at hundreds of hospitals and government offices across Mexico despite the opposi-

As the leadership of Mexican unions shifts towards the independent labour movement, internal differences are more evident.

Canada, where he is supported by the United Steel Workers union. Independent union federations have offered their support to Urrutia, calling the case an attack on union autonomy by the state. As the result of their overtures, the SNTMMRSM—Mexico's most powerful private sector union—has edged away from the PRI labor federations.

Differences over pension fightback

However, while the leadership of Mexican unions increasingly shifts towards the pole of the independent labour movement, internal differences are becoming more evident. In the weeks prior to May Day, unions in the FSM and the UNT debated their response to public sector pension reform. They initially agreed upon a plan for three days of work stoppages and demonstrations between April 30 and May 2, which was principally followed by the CNTE. On May 2, these dissident members of the national union of education workers (SNTE) shut down 1,200 primary and secondary schools across Mexico City and hundreds more in other CNTE strongholds across the country, including the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Zacatecas.

tion of national union leaders.

Labour militancy has been concentrated in Mexico City and the southern states, particularly Oaxaca, where the Popular Assemblies of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) and the CNTE have returned to activity after suffering heavy police and paramilitary repression in November and December 2006. Oaxacan teachers affiliated to the CNTE-led section 22 of the SNTE are struggling to re-take control of many schools across the state occupied by a scab teacher's union local formed by the PRI state government last winter to fight the CNTE.

Both the APPO and the Oaxacan section of the CNTE are experiencing major internal conflicts. One faction seeks to centralize these organizations and align them with political parties, while other members strive to maintain the original accountability of the organizations to grassroots community or workplace committees and assemblies. It is mostly the activists who refuse to engage in state politics and advocate non-hierarchical organizing that are subjected to harassment, arrests, violent attacks and disappearances by police and paramilitaries.

Teachers call national strike May 7

Meanwhile, the national CNTE has declared an open-ended nationwide strike to begin on May 7 in opposition to public pension cuts. Members of university unions are discussing their participation, though actions are likely to be mainly symbolic and small in scale.

Despite the deep divisions within the Mexican left between the opposition movement of politician Andrés Manuel López Obrador and the grassroots Other Campaign led by the Zapatistas, the CNTE has publicly called for the support of both in its upcoming strike.

In recognition of May Day and the anniversary of the police attack on the autonomous community of San Salvador Atenco in 2006, the Other Campaign has increased its ongoing protests. While these marches and rallies are dwarfed by the union-led demonstrations, unlike most of the former, they are being held consistently, with the participation of marginalized social movements that have endorsed the Other Campaign.

On May 1, up to a thousand people participated in a Mexico City march led by a neighbourhood organization opposed to the municipal government's plans to evict street vendors from the urban working class *barrio* of Tepito. They were joined by a couple hundred members of a sex workers' association, a collective of radical telecommunications workers and many more students, Zapatistas and anarchist activists.

Uniting all these diverse groups is their involvement in the Other Campaign. On May 2 and subsequent days, the Zapatistas have led protests against the detention of political prisoners from San Salvador Atenco, with the participation of prisoner solidarity groups.

Despite their small size and separation from the mainstream of Mexican labour, the Other Campaign has the potential to slowly build its strength through the formation of a stable coalition between these diverse grassroots groups. The examples of the Zapatistas and rank-and-file union activists demonstrate that in the midst of shifting political alliances within the labour movement and community struggles, grassroots organizing continues to be strong in Mexico.

Argentine teachers fight for rights on May Day

By Rhiannon Edwards

Workers in Buenos Aires marked May Day with multiple actions and marches around the city. There was a large march on the Plaza de Mayo, in front of the national government house, that was attended by members of various unions along with political parties and human rights organizations.

The revolutionary union, Federación Obrera Regional de Argentina (FORA) chose to commemorate the day with a gathering in the Plaza Miserere, attended by 150 people, in an attempt to reclaim the anarchist history of May Day. The speakers at the FORA meeting addressed the struggle for the eight-hour work day from which May Day was born in order to draw attention to the continued erosion of workers' rights and labor conditions.

Persistently high unemployment and under-employment, poverty wages, and the increasing precarity of labour continue to affect the vast majority of Argentine workers, despite official statistics that boast economic recovery.

The issues at the forefront of all the May Day activities across the country were the current struggles of the nation's teachers and the violent repression that they have encountered from the state. Teachers of all levels across the country

have been engaged in fights for better wages and working conditions over the past few months.

All of the gatherings of workers this May Day carried the memory of the late teacher Carlos Fuentealba and indignation of his death at the hands of police in the province of Neuquén in April.

The teachers' union had set up a roadblock of an important highway on Wednesday, April 4, after a month of striking for better wages. The governor of the province, Jorge Sobisch, ordered the police to break up the roadblock and during the ensuing confrontation a policeman fired a canister of tear gas from close range into the back of a car. The canister hit teacher Carlos Fuentealba, 40, in the back of the head. Fuentealba died the next day in hospital.

The following Monday, April 9, teachers of all levels in all parts of the country responded with a 24-hour general strike, accompanied by hundreds of demonstrations in urban centres, some of which drew thousands of people. The Central de Trabajadores de Argentina (CTA) announced that some 60,000 people from unions as well as social, political, and human rights organizations converged in the centre of Buenos Aires and marched to the Neuquén govern-

ment house.

Even the more conservative Central General de Trabajadores (CGT) called a one-hour general solidarity strike. Nearly a month later, the teachers' struggle continues in different forms across the country.

There has been little action on the part of the government to deliver justice for Fuentealba's death.



Photo by Ronny Stansert.

I-07 Argentine delegates Dario Santillan piqueteros and members of the Vigo libertarian choir from Galicia, Spain march together in Paris, France.

LAPD suspends 60 police rioters

The Los Angeles Police Department suspended up to 60 members of the officers who attacked peaceful May Day demonstrators and reporters in MacArthur Park.

"I'm not going to defend the indefensible," said Police Chief William Bratton, according to the Associated Press. Police reportedly fired 148 rubber bullets into the crowd.

The suspended police were part of Metropolitan Division B Platoon.

The LAPD demoted its top two commanding officers at the park. Deputy Chief Cayler Carter of Operations Central Bureau was reassigned "to his home" with the rank of Commander, while his second-in-command, Commander Louis Gray was assigned to an unstated role at the Office of Operations.

The demotions and suspensions are temporary, pending the result of two internal police investigations.

The initial attempt of the LAPD to blame the incident on "the illegal and disruptive actions of 50 to 100 agitators who were not a part of the larger group of thousands of peaceful demonstrators" failed to sate critics, who said the police assault was another stage in the war on immigrants.

Under the slogan, "They won't silence us!", community, church and labor groups joined thousands of people on May 17 in MacArthur Park in a 'take back the park' protest. The action was meant to defy the police and government's fear-mongering.



Photo by Amanda, la.indymedia.org
The immigrant rights movement will not be intimidated, said protester's sign as he holds a lit candle.



Photo by Marcus Africanus, la.indymedia.org
A Great American Boycott protester in Los Angeles calls for an end to the separation of families by immigration.

Zurich's May Day to be abolished?

By Rhiannon Edwards

The Swiss right-wing party Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP) proposed the idea of abolishing the May 1 as a national holiday in response to the extreme vandalism after last Tuesday's official protest march. For years, Zurich has been a meeting point for demonstrators from Switzerland, southern Germany, and Austria. This year, once again, police were unable to restrain members of the Black Block and others from causing significant material damages to shops, banks, traffic lights, tram stops, and cars in the popular district 4.

Zurich's enraged mayor Elmar Ledergerber called a press meeting and publicly let off some steam, mostly blaming parents for being unable to educate their children properly and stating his own incomprehension as to the motives of those "violent rioters."

For the last five years, the organizing committee of the official May 1 march and follow-up party, in collaboration with the city's government, has tried to limit the destruction of Zurich's district 4 and to separate the vandals from the official protest, but has had very little success.

UK bosses deny minority women

Continued from 1

Other unwritten rules are the assumption by clients and other staff that black or Asian workers are automatically secretarial or non-professionals.

Minorities also feel pressured to be the token minority for 'diversity' events or are assigned professional-level jobs limited such as equal opportunity officers or other diversity-related jobs, in effect creating a career ghetto.

The Equal Opportunities Commission made recommendations, but has no enforcement powers.

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IWW in the UK celebrates May Day



Photo by Stephanie Collins.

FWs Rob and son Leo Blow drum up the solidarity at the Leicester UK healthworkers May Day rally.

IWW members across the United Kingdom made their presence known at May Day events.

London

Londoners celebrated May Day at events ranging from Maypole picnic parties to migrant rights benefits to shirking the 9-5 by dancin' in the streets. London IWWs were part of a large and lively autonomous bloc of around 200 'horizontals' of various shades (largely anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and autonomists).

We handed out a few hundred flyers to marchers and we received mostly very positive responses. Several said they planned to join the union soon. On the May 7 bank holiday march, the issue uniting people was all about solidarity with migrant workers. London IWW members also attended the Io7 syndicalist union conference in Paris, France. [Report by Ant.]

Glasgow

The IWW joined with many activist groups with stalls and a sound system set up at the top end of Buchanan Street. A heavy police presence did not dampen the spirits of the celebration. [Report from www.iww.org.uk.]

Edinburgh

On a sunny May 5, the Edinburgh IWW General Membership Branch marched behind our branch banner carrying our super new flags. Joined by some Fellow Workers from the Clydeside GMB (Glasgow), we were one of the largest union contingents on a march which was possibly depleted by the very recent left losses in the Scottish Parliamentary elections. FWs staffed a stall at the rally and made contact with a good number of interested individuals, some of whom are likely to join the union. Next year the branch plans to organise a May Day public meeting and an even more active presence on the march. [Report by Dek.]

Norwich

Members of the newly-formed Norwich IWW joined up with the Norwich Anarchists to picket the local Job Centre where the PCS union had planned to stage a one-day strike. We turned up to find no PCS pickets in place and for most of the time our three IWW members outnumbered the official picketers. We handed out leaflets demanding better treatment for advice centre workers. Later during the day we attended a rally and hustings which although poorly attended brought to our attention that

there were very more issues amongst the workers than were being discussed in the national campaign. [Report by the Norwich IWW group.]

Leicester

The IWW in Leicester marched as part of a lively health workers rally to fight for the National Health Service, which is under threat of privatization. IWW organizer Rob Blow spoke for a couple minutes.

Here is what he said:

"Health workers, you must be sick of the word 'reform.' It's meant to sound like a good thing, isn't it? But it's a disguise for a group of ... vultures ... the destruction of community services, all this because the government wants to steal public resources and hand them to the private sector. In the eyes of the corporate raider, public services represent the last opportunity to make a killing. Everything else has long been privatized."

"When health workers say that reform has cost the NHS 17,000 jobs, New Labour denies the reality of its own actions, claiming a tenth of that number has gone. What liars. New Labour lives in a parallel universe. In that world, the corporate world and the withdrawal of services saves lives, apparently, or prepares the way for better provision."

"The elections simply don't mean nothing, really. The Tories would do exactly the same if they come to power. A healthworker or anyone else who works without being able to make their life safe needs to look at other people in a similar position as you and start to discuss what can be done."

"This is a start today. It's good to see people turning out here but we've got to do so much more, where we live, where we work, in our communities."

"And that's exactly what the IWW offers. It's an organization of workers at the grassroots level with one thought in mind - workplace organization. It's vital to preventing daylight robbery. All healthworkers will have the role and the same interests at heart."

"The thing about the IWW is that, while it's a union, it's a bit different than the mainstream unions. Every union branch is directly controlled by its members. There's no paid officers or anything like that. It's totally grassroots and rank-and-file union."

"Where we organize where they are organized in the mainstream unions, we try to work as rank-and-file organizations. But where we organize where there are no unions, we organize to solve our own problems."



Protesters in Liège, Belgium bang the drum against temp work.

Photo by JazzRoot, liege.indymedia.org

EuroMayDay 2007

Thousands of people marched as part of the EuroMayDay mobilization against temp and short-term work that is becoming commonplace across Europe.

In Vienna, Austria, about 1,500 people marched with eight alternative floats raising issues of desertion, refugees, women and deportation.

In Hamburg, Germany, 200 "super-heroes for freedom" led a crowd of 2,500 people through the streets. A mock prototype of a German U-boat (submarine) was launched to help people crossing from Morocco to Spain, thus making the point that migration from Africa to Europe is an autonomous action, beyond governments and national borders.

Málaga in southern Spain hosted May Day Sur with 500 people marching through the city centre, calling for immigration papers for everyone.

In Liège, Belgium, 500 people rallied to Samba music, demanding papers for the "sans-papiers", illegal immigrants without papers, and an end to precarity in general.

Precarity work –short-term, low-paid and transitory jobs– means that this generation is unlikely to gain the economic stability of previous generations.

Reports are still rolling in from actions as of this writing and are being linked to www.euromayday.org.



The IWW Edinburgh GMB on the march.

Photo by Aljo.



IWW Members marched in Dumfries, Scotland on Workers Memorial Day, April 28, protesting the proposed closure of the local Crichton (University of Glasgow) Campus and establish the importance of education for all.

Ottawa May Day scrambles

About 100 May Day protesters, including members of the IWW panhandlers union and the Ottawa-Outaouais IWW, marched on city business lobbyists in Ottawa, Canada.

After speeches, the Bank Street Promenade Business Improvement Area (BIA) building received a gift of several dozen eggs that scrambled on impact. Police did not intervene, but have since threatened one protester in a wheel chair with arrest.

BIA's, notably the Bank Street and downtown Rideau Centre ones, are the face of business lobbying in Ottawa and the architect of a city-wide plan to "clean up" the city with a crackdown on panhandling and people living on the street.

Ottawa's mayor, newly-elected from Ottawa's business class, recently compared panhandlers to pigeons and

urged people to stop giving money to people on the street so they would go away. The BIA and religiously-oriented shelter charities have echoed this so-called strategy.

Members of the IWW panhandlers union once sold the progressive *Dominion* newspaper and the *Industrial Worker* on Ottawa's streets. However, the former mayor slapped a ban on the sale of or solicitation of donations for the newspaper in Ottawa, halting the panhandlers' attempts to earn a living. The current mayor has rejected a change in this policy.



Members of the IWW panhandlers union march against city crackdown against homeless.

Photo by the ROAD Network.

Dark Side of the Boom—worker death rate hits 25-Year high

By the Alberta Federation of Labour

The Alberta Federation of Labour blamed government inaction on health and safety enforcement for the rising number of workplace fatalities in Alberta. The AFL made the observation on the 11th International Day of Mourning to remember workers killed because of work. The Day of Mourning was marked across the province in hundreds of workplace and community ceremonies.

"It's the dark side of the boom," says AFL President Gil McGowan. "More Alberta workers were killed in 2005 than in any other year in the past quarter century. We may be booming, but the price of that boom is being paid in the lives of workers."

"Employers are busy trying to keep up with demand, and to do so, they are cutting corners. Unfortunately one of the first corners cut is safety — with an end result of growing numbers of accidents and deaths."

McGowan firmly placed the blame on government inaction.

"The government's job is to make sure employers obey the safety laws, but they are doing nothing to make workplaces safer. In fact, they are denying there is a problem at all."

McGowan points out that the government continues to claim workplaces are getting safer, despite growing evi-

dence that things are more dangerous.

Some of the mounting evidence includes:

- A 2005 study found Alberta has the highest rate of work-related acute trauma cases in Canada (CIHI, April 2005).
- Alberta's 2004 fatality rate per capita was the third highest in Canada, behind only Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. (National data for 2005 is not yet available)
- Alberta had almost 170,000 officially recorded workplace accidents in 2005, up 9.3 per cent from 2004. This is almost 500 a day.

The Worker Compensation Board's 2005 Total Disabling Injury Rate (a more accurate measure of safety than the so-called Lost Time Claims rate) is up 5.4 per cent from 2004. It is currently 4.28 per 100 workers.

"Government claims that workplaces are safer today are contradicted by all the evidence," says McGowan. "When the government does acknowledge there is a problem, they blame workers for carelessness and 'stupidity.' This does nothing to address the real causes of injuries."

McGowan points to a series of government print ads that show unsafe work with the large label "STUPID?" The government ads are a case of blaming



The Edmonton IWW joins May Day marchers in the capital city of Alberta, Canada. Photo by David Climenhaga.

the victim. Workers need to work safely, but employers hold the primary responsibility for making workplaces safe. And the government's job is to make sure employers obey the law.

The Day of Mourning was recognized by the Canadian Parliament in 1991. It is now commemorated in more than 80 countries worldwide. The AFL maintains a tally of all workers killed since 1905, which can be found at www.afl.org.

Zimbabweans shrug off co-option of May Day

Unions demand pay increases so working families can survive runaway inflation

Government intimidation failed to keep thousands of Zimbabwean workers from joining an unsanctioned May Day rally in the city of Gwanzura hosted by the militant Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU).

The embattled government of Zimbabwe had sought to herd workers into a state-endorsed celebration in Rufaro, organized by the less-threatening Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU). They offered free bussing and performances by popular musicians. Despite these efforts, the officially sanctioned event was poorly attended, except for a high-profile soccer match that took place later that afternoon (ostensibly part of the May Day celebration).

Instead, most workers defied the government by attending the ZCTU rally. Numerous trades and industries were represented at the rally, including —for

the first time—journalists. The government, for its part, refused to send any of its top officials to either rally. Labor and Social Welfare Minister Nicholas Goche was invited to both rallies but never made an appearance. In several other cities, police banned May Day protests and intimidated workers and activists.

Despite their differences, both union federations voiced many of the same concerns at their events and outlined similar priorities for the immediate future. One of the most important demands expressed by union leaders was an across-the-board pay increase to keep their members above the Poverty Datum Line. Zimbabwe is in the midst of an economic crisis and runaway inflation has dramatically increased the cost of living.

The ZCTU is threatening a major strike should employers refuse to raise wages.

"We want to make it clear today that should the employers fail to increase our salaries in line with the Poverty Datum Line, we will once again go onto the streets," said ZCTU President Lovemore Matombo. "This should be taken seriously because if the employers don't, then they will be forced to close down because we are going to sit at home until these issues are resolved."

The ZCTU had called for a two-day general strike in April but the action was largely pre-empted by massive police violence and intimidation. At the government-sanctioned rally, the ZFTU didn't go as far as threatening a strike but they did declare their intention to press for a minimum wage that meets the poverty line.

The ZFTU also plans to "push for a wholesale overhaul of fundamental rights of the workers," according to the

Zimbabwe Independent.

Yet many Zimbabwean union leaders have come to believe that genuine labor reform will not be possible until serious political reform takes place.

"Zimbabwe simply needs political reforms that will force a change in its policies and ideological approach because failure to put these in place will lead to a catastrophic situation," according to Matombo.

Blasting the government's unflagging support for the country's corporate elite, he declared: "Let me remind ZNCC, CZI, and Emcoz that Zimbabwe does not belong to you and Zanu PF alone. There is urgent need to come together and find solutions to our problems [rather] than continuously pander to the interests of the ruling elite."

For now, no such solution appears close at hand in Harare.

Review

Unions can help elect Democrats—but what for?

The Future of Organized Labor in American Politics by Peter L. Francia. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 216 pages. \$42.

Review by Martin Comack

Does American labor have a future? Organized labor in the US is now arguably in the weakest condition it has ever been in the last hundred years. In the 1950s, one in every three workers outside of the agricultural sector were union members. By the turn of the present century, this number has fallen to less than one in seven.

The title of this book is misleading. Professor Francia's focus is on the immediate present, rather than the future of unionism in America. As the author admits, a narrow focus it is. Politics, according to Francia's definition, is strictly electoral. And his study is concerned mainly with the shift in the political strategy of the AFL-CIO. In the mid-Nineties, the moribund Lane Kirkland was replaced by John Sweeney as head of the Federation—a move that did not involve the rank-and-file, and that veteran labor activist Harry Kelber termed only a "palace revolution." Sweeney promised to get the labor movement moving again, and so he has, compared to his comatose predecessor—after all, a zombie is more animated than a corpse.

Sweeney maintained the close relationship between the AFL officialdom and the Democratic Party, but moved from merely writing checks for Democratic candidates to mobilizing union members for active participation in political campaigns—particularly on the congressional level.

Francia's statistical data shows a positive correlation between union density within a congressional district and the tendency to elect Democrats. This, the author insists, represents labor's strongest political asset. Even though corporate donations to political campaigns have declined in recent years while those of unions have increased, big business still outspends organized labor by almost ten to one in its lobbying efforts in Washington. But, the author maintains, it is in the labor leadership's ability to mobilize its rank and file behind Democratic candidates that levels the electoral playing field. According to this logic, unions should therefore devote more resources to organizing because union members, properly

The Future of Organized Labor in American Politics

PETER L. FRANCIA



directed, can provide the grassroots counterweight to corporate funding of anti-labor candidates. Although he is honest enough to note that such efforts only affect a small number of competitive congressional races, Francia nonetheless argues that only a labor-supported Democratic Party can defend the interests of working people against the big corporations.

Despite a reference to his immigrant grandfather, a hard-working union boilermaker and carpenter, there is no mention in this study of either past or current militant movements that erupt from the ranks of ordinary workers themselves, no mention of the struggle to form their own independent organizations and force union recognition upon reactionary employers, to recruit the unorganized, to democratize their locals—often in the face of violent repression.

The favorable labor legislation passed by a nervous Congress in the 1930s was a reaction to the class warfare that had spread from coast to coast and threatened the social order itself. It was the general strikes and massive labor protests, the pitched battles between workers, scabs, and the forces of law and order in cities like Flint, Minneapolis and San Francisco, the near civil war between labor and capital that brought about legislation like the National Labor Relations Act as an attempt to channel

and contain worker anger and discontent.

And just what is it in the record of the Democratic Party over the last half-century to justify the author's optimistic opinion? Francia admits that the anti-labor Taft-Hartley law was passed by a Republican-controlled Congress in 1947 and has never been repealed, despite long periods when Democrats controlled both Congress and the White House. Indeed, the corporate-sponsored North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), so ruinous to organized labor, was enthusiastically pushed through Congress by the Clinton Administration with a compliant Democratic majority in both Houses. With friends like this, who needs enemies?

The newly-minted Employee Free Choice Act, which was passed by the House of Representatives and is currently working its way through the Senate, may indeed make it easier for workers to organize in their own unions. But President Bush has already promised to reject it (that's one promise he'll keep), and its supporters do not have the two-thirds majority in Congress to override his veto. It might become law at some time in the future—maybe—but if it does it is sure to be immediately challenged in the courts by regiments of corporation lawyers. Don't hold your breath.

To sum up, Professor Francia's prescription for organized labor is as follows: Despite the fact that the Democratic Party has made no serious effort to repeal the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act over the past 60 years, and has in fact passed NAFTA, the most anti-labor piece of legislation enacted since then, rank-and-file union members should volunteer to place themselves under the careful supervision of AFL-CIO officials as an unpaid labor force to work on weeknights and weekends to try to elect more of these same Democrats (although only a small number of congressional races remain really competitive), in the hopes that the Democratic Party will somehow protect their livelihoods and living standards against the ravages of the new corporate world order.

Is this the best advice that liberal intellectuals have for working people? At best, Francia can only provide a weak argument for a dubious policy—hardly a vision for the future.

The history of organized labor in America tells a different story. If there is to be a resurgence of workers' power, it will hardly depend upon legislation concocted in the cloakrooms of Washington. As in the past, as it always has, it will turn upon the militancy, courage and solidarity of those who built the union movement in the first place—the workers themselves—rank-and-file men and women in their workshops, factories and office cubicles. Otherwise, the cause of labor, and of democracy itself, will have no future.

Preston Motors strike in Australia won

By Mike x342055

Community assemblies and broad support in Australia have once again forced another employer to negotiate with the union in dispute.

Congratulations are due to the workers at Preston Motors who stuck together and were successful in achieving a much improved union Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) as a result.

Preston Motors' Campbellfield warehouse workers returned to work on April 16 after successfully negotiating an end to their four-week dispute with the company.

"These workers are not highly paid by anyone's standards. However, they know they are entitled to wages that

reflect their hard work each week," said National Union Workers Victorian State Secretary Antony Thow. He said the employees had displayed incredible resolve and dignity throughout their month-long protest and the settlement was a great outcome for the Preston Motors' warehouse employees.

"The wage increase the employees have successfully negotiated will make a significant difference when trying to provide for themselves and their families."

"This new Union Collective Agreement will take a lot of pressure off the weekly budgets of these workers and enable them to make ends meet in the face of rising living costs."

N. Carolina wildcat suppressed by union

By John Kalwaic

Truck manufacturing workers at the LLC Employer Freightliner Rowan County Plant in North Carolina went on strike on March 5. The workers were organized with the United Auto Workers.

The UAW's contracts expired the previous Saturday and the company planned to lay off nearly 1,200 to 4,000 workers. The *Charlotte Observer*, reported this to be one of the biggest layoffs in North Carolina history. About 700 workers walked off the job at the plant on Monday. Picketing workers who were interviewed said that another big factor in their decision to strike was the need for better benefits. Workers insist that the Rowan plant is the most profitable Freightliner plant, but has the worst benefits of all LLC plants.

However, the national UAW union bosses stepped in and told the workers they were not permitted to be on strike while the union and the company were "negotiating." UAW official Willard Beck of Cleveland declared that the workers at the North Carolina factory "were supposed to be at work." The pickets from the Rowan plant were officially dissolved after the UAW officials denounced the "unauthorized strike."

Without the support of the International UAW or workers from other local plants such as the Gastonia plant, the strike failed. Unlike the Rowan plant, workers at Gastonia supported the new contract, putting the strikers in a difficult situation. It was also not clear how many of the workers at Rowan supported the strike since neither company nor union officials have been willing to disclose much information.

The *Charlotte Observer* reported that nearly all of the 700 employees who went on strike were re-hired, except for 11 people who allegedly led the wildcat. The newspaper declined to identify those individuals.

North and South Carolina are tied as the two US states with the worst unionization rate in the country: only 3.3 percent as compared to the national rate of about 12 percent. Unions have always had a hard time in the southeastern United States due both to racism and anti-union "right to work" state governments.

This latest betrayal of the workers at Rowan by officials in Cleveland and other places does not bode well for union organizers in the South.

Colombia May Day targets neoliberalism

By CUT, Colombia

The Colombian labour central CUT (La Central Unitaria de Trabajadores) declared May Day activities across the country "a complete success" in a May 2 statement.

"This was the May Day with the most citizens and workers in the streets in recent times," said Fabio Arias Giraldo, second vice-president of the CUT.

The CUT denounced the police who teargassed protesters in Bogotá at the end of the event. "We again express our rejection of this aggressive and provocative attitude of the police... even as we were dispersing peacefully."

Enthusiastic demonstrators marched even in mid-sized cities such as Barranquilla, Palmira, Tuluá, Girardot, Floridablanca, Urabá, and Magangue, representing union centrals and their affiliates and farmer, indigenous, student, NGO, civil society, community and popular groups, including militants of the political parties, Polo Democrático and the Liberal party.

Víctor Báez Mosqueira, of the new International Trade Union Federation (ITUC), marched with the CUT in Bogotá.

The mobilization showed the growing support for the country's proposals, democratic projects and alternatives that are growing in response to the neoliberal and authoritarian project of President Uribe (free trade, cutting social transfers, privatizations, national development plan) that has brought on a worsening political crisis and deteriorating conditions for the country and the people living in poverty, said the CUT.

The CUT continues to demand the government respect the tripartite agreement on union rights as well as an increase of the minimum wage in the face of surging inflation.

The CUT mobilized its members as part of the Great Democratic Coalition (la Gran Coalición Democrática) which is a broad-based group to oppose Uribe's policies and party. The group's next action is a national strike on May 23.

Australian Labor Party no working class saviour

By Mike x342055

The opposition Australian Labor Party (ALP) industrial relations platform continues to make a mockery of what Australian unions call their political ally. Their party platform on industrial relations, titled Forward with Fairness, is beyond irony and certainly not funny.

The ALP plan "rewards hard work, gets the balance right between fairness and flexibility, and secures future prosperity," boasts the ALP web site, and posits it as an alternative to "even more extreme industrial relations laws" from the Liberal Party, which has won the past five elections under Prime Minister John Howard.

In the name of anyone-but-Howard partisan politics, union leaders seem to be falling for the ALP's policy.

The national secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, Doug Cameron, allowed himself to be cowed into accepting it.

"Nobody should lose sight of the fact we have to get rid of Howard's Industrial Relations laws which have removed the rights of millions of Australians," said Cameron in a media statement. On May 1, Cameron then announced he was standing for election with the same ALP.

Rudd and his party have adopted a take-it-or-leave-it bully stance with his labor policy, counting on his party being the union movement's sole strategy for repealing the current government's laws, which restrict secondary picketing among other things.

"This is an entirely reasonable and balanced position from our point of view ... for Doug or anyone else to object to that I don't think is fair dinkum or real," he told ABC radio.

Yet, this proposal is the equivalent if not worse than Howard's own plan in 1997. Despite vague promises of reform, the new ALP leader, Kevin Rudd, has no mind to change the present legislation. The ALP has long wanted to ensure mass strikes would not occur across industries.

"Striking across an industry will also be unlawful under our system; you will need to be bargaining for a deal at your enterprise," said Julia Gillard, deputy leader of the ALP. So each little segment of the working class would be left, under Labor's scheming, to take on its particular global multinational all by itself.

This "labor" proposal would ban all strikes unless taken in pursuit of an enterprise bargaining agreement and it would ban industry-wide ("pattern") bargaining. Secret ballots, too, would be mandatory—the first time this party has had the nerve to demand such a requirement. It would be illegal for workers to respond with industrial action to unfair management actions such as the victimisation of union activists, restructuring of the workplace or unsafe work practices. Workers in more weakly-organised workplaces who have only gained improvements through industry-wide campaigns and some who, in the nature of things, cannot do otherwise, would continue to be as second-class citizens on minimum wages and conditions.

The proposal doesn't get any better. There would be no mention of penalties for employers who lock out workers or sack workers and replace them with cheaper workers.

The restrictions are all on the workers' side. Only one side is "deregulated"; for the other, the regulations are, and will be, legion.

In this atmosphere, the corporate media such as Rupert Murdoch's *Australian* have begun to assert their power and put fear into the common wage-slave. The Rudd-led Labor party has been "getting on board."

As in the Hawke-led ALP regime of



the ACCORD, any wildcat or unofficial strike outside the system would get the same ruthless treatment then dished out to the Airline Pilots (scabbed on and criminalised) and the Builders Labourers Federation (de-registered and criminalised). Uppity workers like nurses and tram conductors ranks were also purged, industry corporatised then privatised and now is in the final stages of collapse, until the taxpayers come to fix up the mess the "Captains of Industry" created.

Strike pay would be banned. This policy would give strikers no way of recouping the severe losses that a strike can entail and act as yet further discouragement for workers to redress their own grievances through direct action.

Instead, if enacted this policy would train workers to do everything through the state and through the tame-cat unions that serve it, while union officials would look with longing to the parliamentary seat on which to put their bum.

The ALP plans to ban industrial action unless it is authorised by a secret ballot—a simple act of democracy, according to Gillard. While her commitment to the pure abstract principles of democracy is praiseworthy, we wait with interest to see what would happen when the secret ballot is introduced into her party caucus votes. Of course we would need a secret ballot to end a strike also, I suppose? What the secret ballot is about is taking the decision away from the workers involved and mediating the direct action of the wage slave by a long drawn out bureaucratic processes. In the last resort it is about control, not about democracy. The workers themselves should say what method of decision-making they will use before they take action and they should administer the secret ballot system themselves.

The delays of such a system would be fateful. Every day that is lost campaigning, giving the arguments for and against, casting votes and having them (and the membership lists) scrutinised, counted, re-counted and the results officially announced, is a day more for the bosses to prepare and marshal their resources and build up reserves. It means days to get their mates in the media to start fear-mongering and union-bashing. It is a day to go to the courts complaining that this or that procedure has not been followed to the letter. It is a day to find and recruit scabs.

With all this sacrifice, what does the wage slave get from the deal? Well if you are in a small enterprise (under 15 employees) then you will be protected from unfair dismissal, if you survive there for a year! You can imagine turnover will increase around ten months. All the working class problems of petty workplace tyrants, sexual harassment, bullying and the rest will remain.

You would think that the ALP would at least make some changes on Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs). That there would be some sort of restoration of a few extra conditions.

Say, a tad extra in penalty rates for working weekends and Good Friday. Perhaps they will—to some small, moderate extent. Small is not insignificant as social and family life for working people and communities can be helped or wrecked by such things. Compared, however, to the massive shift in power away from us and toward the bosses being consolidated by the Liberal-Labour consensus, it is too small to celebrate.

The ALP can rename the AWA that holds you hostage to be instead a "common law contract," a concept that was once anathema to the Left just a few short years ago. The wise will wait to see the devil in the details before they crack open the champagne.

What we need now is not a strike across an industry or a cosmetic change to industrial relations law. What we need is an independent, worker-led general strike across the nation to get rid of Howard's laws and to show the pathetic ALP pretenders to the throne where to get off the bus.

Neither Liberal Prime Minister's Fraser nor Menzies would have had the nerve to impose these conditions upon the Australian working class. Yet, such an undertaking can only be pushed forward by the left-wing of the capitalist consensus, confident of not losing votes to the left (what right thinking decent human being would give Howard another go?) and, by being hard on unions and workers, eagerly hoping to make inroads into the right. The ALP has always hated and distrusted the working person taking any collective direct action for his or her self. The golden age that some fools

look back to when it stood four square for such things is purely mythical. They smiled upon the worker as a voter and as a member of a union giving funds to the party while employing university graduate lawyers to sheepishly put their case before some judge in an arbitration court. Anything in the nature of a real exercise of power by the oppressed at the point of production rocks the rotten system that sustains their power and pleasure.

The ALP is now presenting itself to the Australian People as something creative by recycling the decades-old policies of the Liberals. Our tame cat unions are all so enamored at the thought of jobs for the boys with an ALP victory after all the years of drought, that they greet it with enthusiasm.

So how are you going to vote, fellow worker? Some are already urging a boycott of the election in view of the essential similarity of the Liberal Party/Australian Labor Party policies. Their point is that the act of voting will be claimed by the victors as a vote for their policy whether you have a real choice or not and will be used to bolster its legitimacy. Some argue that all elections should be treated this way for much the same reasons. Others argue that any mitigation in the level of attacks is worth something.

Frankly, I don't care much. You can cast your ballot or you can attack the ballot box with an axe. Neither one nor the other is going to help you in the great class struggle that is rippling through Australia and the world and will continue to do so even as it is unfashionable to say so. Organise at the base. Link up. As a Eureka Stockade veteran put it: "Be scornful, sullen and proud." Resist. Build solidarity. Lay plans for a better world. These are the deep currents that can deliver you real results—all else is but froth and spume.

Australian minimum wage reveals one million 'working'

By Mike x342055

Almost one million Australians make up the "working poor". We live in households in which at least one adult has a job but earns only the federal minimum wage.

We are concentrated in labouring, clerical and services roles and work mainly in the hospitality and wholesale and retail trade industries. We spend a "significantly higher proportion of our household budgets on necessities"—food, housing, clothing, utility bills and transport—than the average household.

So says a joint submission of state and territory governments to Australia's Fair Pay Commission.

Surprise sur-bloody-surprise. How many of you have actually met one of these high flying "average households" by the way?

The commission is reviewing the federal minimum wage and the wider network of minimum rates in federal pay scales which in effect set wages for about 2 million employees. Although the stats come in a joint submission to the Fair Pay Commission from state and territory Labor governments we look in vain for any evidence that our fat cat labor pollies really understand their significance.

In Western Australia, for example, Premier Carpenter reminded the public that the state government has increased seatbelt fines to \$500 and four demerit points. For those in middle management, of course, this is lunch money today. But for families with one wage earner on the federal minimum wage

-\$13.47 an hour for adults—always juggling with a couple of major unpaid bills, this is stuffing outrageous. Does Premier Carpenter realise what the loss of \$500 means to a family in this situation? The cat earning \$75,000 or more per annum has a lot more reserves than the mug on \$13.47 an hour. The former can afford to miss a week of wages and not really notice while for the latter, it is a major household disaster.

The joint submission says the commission should "recognise that for a large group of workers regular minimum wage increases provide the only form of upward earnings mobility."

Strangely missing were the words: "Until they get organised and start taking serious direct action rather than waiting on government pay submissions, commissions, omissions, or emissions." That's right wage slaves, it's time to kick out the inhibitions!

The research on low-income households is based on unpublished Bureau of Statistics data and the Federal Government's latest Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey.

The analysis of the survey data found there were an estimated 356,000 households making up the working poor in 2005. They represented 6.5 per cent of all households where at least one person was employed. A total of 982,000 people, including 213,000 dependent children aged 14 or under, lived in the working-poor households.

Tightline Johnson: The Long Road

FICTION—PART 4

By Joseph Lapp II

Tightline Johnson is a fictional character created by IWW writer, Ralph Winstead.

I'll do a little recap for those just comin' in. After comin' down outta the woods from a long hiatus I decided to get back to workin' for the One Big Union.

Right as soon as I heard about the organizin' drive against those corporate enemies of the working class at Starbucks I walked down to the nearest shop and got me a job. After gettin' folks together and talkin' union we started an organizin' committee, came up with a list of grievances, and delivered 'em to management and to the press.

Also, to ensure a suitably pliant managerial reaction we had decided on engagin' in a little industrial sabotage. There's nothin' worse than bein' ignored by them you're tryin' to do battle with, so we wanted to make sure that it just wasn't gonna be possible. I guess that brings everybody up to speed.

Management hadn't much liked gettin' handed a list of demands from a bunch of workers they was certain was too overworked to ever give em' much trouble. Even worse, the workers went and blabbed to every newspaper and radio station in Seattle about how they was bein' mistreated and wasn't about to take it layin' down anymore. I knew that corporate headquarters and their pinkertons were probably buzzin' like a nest of stirred up bees, and more than likely some of 'em had been meetin' with our managers until the wee hours.

Now, back in my loggin' days I used to play some chess. You may not think that a bunch of loggers, some barely able to read, would be playin' chess, but we did. There's this notion in chess called havin' the initiative. It's when you're movin' forward, pressin' the attack, and givin' your opponent no choice but to play defense. Gettin' and hangin' on to the initiative is how you win. We had the initiative after our surprise attack the day before, but management was surely scheming up a way to get it back. We weren't gonna let that happen.

I walked to the store and found a picket line already set up outside. We weren't in this fight alone. If the labor movement is gonna become somethin' that actually moves again it's gotta get matched up with its natural allies. Luckily, labor has lots of allies, even if some don't realize it. In just about every decent-sized town there's groups dedicated to social justice. Now sure, plenty of folks in these organizations ain't exactly workers, but that don't mean that they ain't a friend of labor. The One Big Union ain't as big as it used to be, so if we really want give organized labor some legs we gotta get friendly with some of

these groups. I ain't sayin' we got to endorse anybody else's ideals, but when we're fightin' the same enemy we might as well fight 'em together. The organizin' committee must've been reachin' out to these folks. They were there carryin' signs and handin' out leaflets to people goin' in and those just passin' by. It was good to see decisions bein' made and carried out without my input.

I shook hands with a few of the picketers and walked on in. I saw to my great enjoyment that the place was full of folks waitin' in line for coffee. The slowdown we'd voted on was workin'! While the customers waited in line, all the workers was smilin' like I'd never seen before. They was chattin' up the customers, makin' jokes, and generally enjoying bein' at work.

Scissor Bill, our uptight manager, was runnin' around orderin' the workers to speed up. While one was dutifully obeyin' his commands with the manager right behind her, the rest was goin' about their business at whatever pace suited 'em. What I saw when I got up close made me guffaw like I hadn't in years. My fellow workers were drawin' the letters IWW into every frothy drink they made! Now that's why I love this union—a drinkable union label is somethin' only a wobbly would come up with!

After my chuckle, I looked to see what was goin' on around me. One of the workers was cleanin' more thoroughly than I'd ever seen. He was scrubbin' till everything he touched glowed. Another worker was behind the register doin' her very best to get every customer to smile even though they'd had to wait so long. Two other workers was makin' those beautiful little pieces of propaganda-in-a-cup I just told ya about.

I set about to get to work myself, but just as I grabbed a cup to try my hand at the latte label technique they'd developed I heard the voice of John D., the district manager, callin' out my name. He musta been hidin' in the back waitin' for me to come in. I walked over to him and he made a motion for me to follow him back to the office. Just as I was about to leave the floor I saw a group of the protesters come in to leaflet the folks waitin' in line. I grinned when I saw the look on Scissor Bill's face as he rushed out to intercept 'em.

John D. Manager made to close the office door after we'd walked through it but I stopped him.

"If we're gonna be havin' a closed door kinda chat I'd like to have a co-worker in here with me if it's all the same to you," I said.

John D. knew he couldn't say no so he walked back out and called in James, the new convert who'd helped me deliver our demands the day before. James looked a little nervous so I gave him a

wink. I had a pretty good idea about how this was gonna go and didn't figure that he needed to worry.

"Well, Mr. Johnson, I guess you must be feeling good about yourself. Do you realize that Starbucks would be within its rights to fire everybody out there?" said John D. He was tryin' to seem confident, but he was pretty anxious. I hear Starbucks can be a bit tough on managers who let a union form up right under their noses.

"Both of us know that if you could do that you would, Mr. Manager. The people out there don't mean a damn to you and up 'til today you thought you could come in and replace any one of 'em like a piece of machinery. Now you're realizin' that you can't." This kinda thing gets fun after you do it enough times to get over bein' nervous.

"Look Johnson..."

"What happened to the 'mister'?" I interrupted, smilin'.

"...the first thing I have to say is that Starbucks has a great deal of respect for our team members. We support their decisions and if they want a union then we won't stop them, but these things have to be done properly. You are aware of the process recognized by the National Labor Relations Board?"

"I'm aware how much you'd like us to bring in the Board so you could sit back and fire us off one by one. Then after all your appeals run out, you'd have us all either out of here or so trampled down that we couldn't put up a fight. That ain't what we're about. We're gonna fight to get what we want, not just recog-

nition but better wages, better benefits, respect and all the rest."

"Well, Johnson, that isn't going to happen. I'm afraid I have to inform you that you're being terminated for repeated lateness."

"That's the first I've ever heard of it," I said.

"It's come to our attention that you've come in late three times since you've been here and therefore you're officially terminated." He wasn't too good at this, despite how clever he seemed to think he was. It's like he was tryin' to make it easy for me to get my job handed back to me by Uncle Sam.

"That's just fine, but firin' me ain't gonna stop the union. The union is no more me than it is James here, or any of us alone. The union is all of us, end every man and woman that works for a livin' rather than leachin' off of others. You can fire me, but you ain't gonna fire this union. I promise you that."

After sayin' that, I walked out of the office, with James close behind.

"That's pretty much how I figured things would go," I said.

"We both know he can't get away with that, Tightline," James replied.

"That's alright James, you folks have got this thing under control and my feet are startin' to get itchy. I think it's time that I was movin' on."

James nodded and we walked back onto the shop floor. The workers were still smilin' and havin' a good time, feelin' proud, defiant, and full of their power. That was good.

That's what this whole thing is all about.

THE END.

Editors' Note: What did you think of this story? Send us a letter at iw@iww.org or by mail and let us know!

Israel rattled by strikes at ports, schools

By John Kalwaic

Workers at the Bank of Israel went on strike in March to protest the returning of overpaid wages to the Bank without the consent of the workers. There was also a wildcat strike at the Ashod Port that ended with a partial victory for the workers with a deal that gave some power to the workers' committee at the port.

In April, teachers at Haifa and Tel Aviv Schools voted to strike, demanding a pay increase among other things. The schools in those cities have offered to give teachers a 22 per cent pay increase but the teachers turned it down.

During May Day celebrations, students at Tel-Aviv University and Haifa as well as other colleges went on strike in April and May while student unions pro-

tested budget cuts and tuition hikes. As students began demonstrating, the mood got more and more tense and militant students broke out of the control of both the student union leaders and the police. Students blocked streets and burned tires. The students were supported by an array of sympathizers including leftist politicians and celebrities.

There was talk of the professors also striking in solidarity, but there was no guarantee that they would join in. The school offered to extend assignment dates to any student who stopped the strike. The Haifa College Student Union had initially wanted to withdraw but changed its position in response to widespread student outrage.



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Solidarity with Health Care Workers in Hannover, Germany

The International Solidarity Commission sent a letter of solidarity to the workers of Klinikum Wahrendorff GmbH hospital in Hannover, Germany who are under attack by management. The ISC condemned the hospital's vicious union-busting tactics, including the firing of union supporters. The ISC applauded the efforts of the DGB-Ortskartell Lehrte and the Freie ArbeiterInnen Union (FAU) in fighting back against the actions of the hospital's management.

Solidarity with Striking Teachers in Guatemala

The ISC sent a statement of solidarity to teachers in Guatemala who went on strike April 23rd for better wages, respect, no privatization of the school system, and adequate supplies and healthy snacks for students. The teachers, organized with the Asamblea Nacional del Magisterial (ANM) and the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Educación de Guatemala (STEG), have been threatened with legal action by the government. The ISC called upon the Government of Guatemala to agree to the teachers' just demands and to support public education and the workers who make it possible.

Polish workers fight forced overtime and unsafe conditions

By John Kalwaic

Workers at the LG manufacturing plants formed a branch of Poland's famous Solidarity trade union after being exposed to forced overtime and unsafe conditions. LG is one of the biggest and most important companies in Poland. They have franchises such as LG Electronics, LG Phillips and LG Innotech.

Workers at these TV monitor-producing factories are also exposed to dangerous conditions and have to work long hours. At the Biskupice Podorn Plant there were

two accidents on in April and one in December. Two workers, 49 and 31, respectively, were both killed while tried to repair machines.

Workers were enraged both by the

death of their colleagues and also by the fact that they had been forced to work mandatory overtime.

Employees at the plant were looking forward to a long May Day weekend.

The "last straw" occurred when the boss forced them to work two hours overtime.

Workers walked off the job and demanded the company provide safety clothing, breaks during working hours and an end to forced overtime. That is when they decided to join Solidarity.

Unfortunately many of the workers who joined were fired. There is now an ongoing campaign to provide justice for the fired workers as well as to improve conditions at the plant.

General strike rocks Guinea: roots of struggle

By Fred Jones

The aluminum tubing for your bike's frame and wheels is made from an ore called bauxite, which was likely mined in Guinea, in central West Africa.

Guinea is the world's largest producer of bauxite, just ahead of Brazil and Jamaica. Guinea is said to possess one third of all the bauxite in the world and bauxite is its number one export.

Guinea's story is told all too often: in order to make money on aluminum, a company like Reynolds has to acquire bauxite ore as cheaply as possible. This, of course, requires that bauxite miners are paid as little as possible—therefore, there is no tax base—and World Bank and IMF loans virtually guarantee there will be no development of infrastructures like clean water, health care, schools and electricity.

At some point, the miners become fed up with their exploitation and complain, strike, and sometimes even riot. The police and military are called on to quiet things down, maybe even kill some people. Every capitalist knows this, so much so that strikes, riots and their quelling are fully a part of the global capitalist economic system.

But from another perspective, these are the very reasons why capitalism must be abolished as quickly as possible. Its viciousness, which it always tries to deny and hide, is its primary characteristic. Capitalism creates and distributes its gulags and work camps (also called 'third-world nations') while trying to get (first-world) consumers to forget that

people's lives are at stake. In this view, the world's distribution of medicines and clean water—controlled primarily by banks and pharmaceutical companies through which at least 1.4 million people die a year from treatable illnesses—can only be called genocide.

From this point of view, Guinea's resistance to capital is different than capitalism's 'business as usual', strike-counterstrike. The average age of a Guinean is 17, whereas in the United States, it is 35. These Guineans grew up without the promises of the socialism of Guinea's first president, Ahmed Sekou Toure, (1958–1983) and have lived through the worst of neoliberal policies under its corrupt, present leader, Lansana Conte, who came to power in a military coup in 1984. In an interview for the UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs, one youth explained how he and his friends had absolutely no hope for the future and had decided to rebel.

From other reports, the three week general strike in January 2007, came on the heels of protests and riots beginning in April 2006. Union workers and civil servants, as well as students and small businesspeople took to the streets and shut down the capital, Conakry, and several other cities a dozen times throughout the year.

As Conte agreed to appoint a Prime Minister (a seat which he himself had dissolved), riots and protests broke out again in March 2007, until an acceptable representative could be chosen. The Conte government was not completely

overthrown, but Guineans came close, as radio, TV and Internet stations were shut down and more than 120 people were killed before the unions relented to the government agreement. The new Prime Minister, Lansana Kouyate has agreed to review all mining contracts and to reduce the costs of rice and gasoline for the general public. It is still an open question as to whether the past year is a gain which can be built upon by young Guineans.

In some ways, it is a shame to see how badly things have devolved from the rhetorical Pan-Africanism of Guinea's first president, Ahmed Sekou Toure. Guinea was the first African nation to declare independence, in 1958—from its French colonizers—a fact for which it was economically punished for nearly seventeen years by France and its allies.

Toure, and then president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, who had written extensively about African revolution and solidarity, formed the A-APRP (the All-African People's Revolutionary Party) which still exists today. As the history books are yet being written, it appears that the CIA had a hand in the deposition of both presidents. Yet, mistakes of a top-down kind were already being

made in both Guinea and Ghana, as both presidents silenced dissidents, while imprisoning protesters and strikers. Both presidents were proponents of a kind of hierarchical socialism which became totalitarian, and then devolved into genocidal capitalism.

That Guinea is purportedly an 85 per cent traditional Muslim country seems to have had little effect on its people's ability to raise hell and to riot. Here one can wonder if "going all the way" politically means for Guineans to have a theocracy, but at second glance, Guinea's unions appear too strong to allow such a turn of events to occur.

At the same time, there is cause for concern over the state of Guinea's civil society, its institutions and unions in their ability to 'represent' their people. This is where things start to get difficult, as we know those institutions are hierarchical as well, and "totalitarianism by representation" is still totalitarianism.

Yet we should ask ourselves, "Who in the past year has come closest to the overthrow of genocidal capitalism, to embracing an autonomous direct democracy?" "The United States of America or Guinea?" From this author's vantage point, it sure looks like Guinea.

High school students in New Jersey strike to support teachers

By John Kalwaic

On April 9, 100-150 students staged a walkout at Ramapo High School in northern New Jersey to support striking teachers there. At first, fewer students than expected came out but as time went on more and more students decided to participate. Students braved the harsh cold weather as they walked out. Picketers and supporters cheered as the students walked out of class.

The principal said he supported what the students were doing but insisted they return to class. The students defied the principal as most stayed outside to con-

tinue the protest. Some of the students went home to get blankets for the others.

Police quickly arrived on the scene and a police helicopter hovered over the school as the students left their classrooms. The helicopter eventually left but the police cars stayed. Students reported being threatened by the principal and school security guards. The principal was heard to have said that students would be marked as "cutting" if they continued the rally. Overall, the student strike was considered a successful defiance of the school system by the students on behalf of their teachers.

Irish and Polish agency workers walk out against discrimination in Dublin

By John Kalwaic

On April 27, around 80 Polish immigrant and native Irish employment agency workers pulled a one-day wildcat, demanding better conditions and an end to discrimination. The agency workers—both Irish and Polish—were contracted to the Musgrave warehouse in Dublin.

The strike "flash point" occurred when a worker was sent home for a mistake that was made by management. Strikers also said that management frequently discriminates against the immigrant agency workers and conditions have deteriorated. The company arbitrarily changed the work schedules of the employees who now must work four hours in temperatures as low as 4 degrees Celsius.

While the workplace is organized with the mainstream Services, Indus-

trial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), which represents 200,000 Irish workers, most of the agency workers are not members of the union.

That changed with the walkout, although the workers did not all organize with the same union. Most of the workers joined the newly-formed Independent Workers Union (IWU), while a few joined SIPTU.

The IWU was founded a few years ago in response to the mainstream Irish Congress of Trade Unions, which it saw as selling out its workers both because of it has ties to the Labor Party and its "no strike clause" with the government.

The Musgrave Corporation has franchises in the United Kingdom and Spain.

IU620 News

Education workers in Leicestershire UK have recently formed an Industrial Organising Committee to facilitate the building of new IU620 branches at a number of educational establishments in the county. At a meeting on 11 April, members were present from Countesthorpe Community College, DeMontfort University (where the IWW already has a growing 620 branch), Gateway College, Leicester Adult Education College and Leicester College (with apologies from Loughborough University members). Participants reported from their various workplaces, discussed the role of the new IOC, and have decided to organise a countywide rank and file education workers conference, to take place in October or November 2007.

Education Worker International

IU620 members have recently launched a website aimed at organising migrant education workers across the globe with EWIU 620. For more info, go to www.ewiu-international.org

Iranian Workers Attacked on May Day

By John Kalwaic

This year thousands of people demonstrated across Iran on May Day. Police, security guards and other government forces frequently attacked the crowds of workers, teachers and students who participated in these demonstrations.

In Tehran, only speakers from the government-controlled "Workers House" union were allowed to speak at Shiroodi (formerly Amjadie) Stadium. Yet many demonstrators from independent unions and grassroots organizations took part in the event and did not let Alireza Mahjoub, the speaker for the Workers House, go forth with his talk. They chanted slogans denouncing the régime and the "official" union, interrupting Mahjoub's speech. Seven thousand workers left the stadium and tried to begin a march, but government and Workers House security forces attacked many of them.

In many other cities in Iran, workers demonstrated, shouting slogans like "workers, students and teachers unite." A large number came out to support the Workers Syndicate of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company which authorities cracked down on a few years ago.

Bus workers carried the symbol of the bus workers union in May Day demos. Workers in Iran have now created many independent unions and done actions.

In Sanandaj, workers were denied permission to hold a march. As a result they protested outside the labor office. Security officers then surrounded them. Police also attacked workers after Mr. Sheys Amani, chairman of the National Union of Sacked Workers, publicly announced this newly-formed union of unjustly fired workers. Workers chanted "ban child labor, "long live May Day," and "right to organize, right to strike." Demonstrators also demanded the immediate release of the imprisoned leader of the bakers union, Mahmoud Salehi, who went on a 24-hour hunger strike to protest his unjust detention. There were many other celebrations throughout Iran.

It was only a few years ago that a handful of Iranians were imprisoned for merely trying to celebrate the May Day holiday. This May Day in Iran was one of the most tumultuous and vibrant celebrations in the world this year.

India sex workers rally

Over 3,000 sex workers from West Bengal organized a night rally and march on May Day to demand their human rights and legal status as workers. The torchlit march began in Songachi—one of the largest red light districts in Asia—at midnight and ended at College Square in the city of Kolkata. The action was coordinated by the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), an organization that represents over 65,000 sex workers in the West Bengal area. The DMSC formed in 1995.

"In the past one decade we have seen a sea change in the minds of common people," said Bharati Dey, the organization's program director. "At least now they give recognition to the sex workers and treat them as human beings in the society." She added: "If a normal worker can enjoy all facilities in the modern world, why can't the sex workers, as they also toil hard to earn their livelihood?"

According to Dey there are almost 10 million sex workers and 50 million people are directly or indirectly associated with the profession. Prostitution is criminalized in India and so sex workers receive no protection from the government, leaving them vulnerable to abuse.

Just Garments closes amidst

Just Garments, an El Salvador-based factory that was promoted around the world as a "unionized cooperative" and a model of fair trade clothing manufacturing has closed down amidst financial crisis and widespread allegations that the company had reverted to the sweatshop conditions of its predecessors. Workers have been locked out by the building's landlord following the company's bankruptcy.

Just Garments was formed in 2003 after several garment workers at Taiwanese-owned Tainan Enterprises in the San Bartolo free trade zone (in Soyapango, just outside of the capital city of San Salvador), were fired for trying to form a union. With the support of a Salvadoran nonprofit organization and the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center, the factory's 1,200 garment workers joined the Sindicato de Trabajadores de Industrias Textiles (STIT), becoming the first union in the history of El Salvador's maquila industry. The company responded by closing its doors and outsourcing production. The newly unemployed workers were blacklisted throughout the free trade zone.

A coalition of US-based unions and anti-sweatshop organizations launched an international campaign to re-open Tainan as a union shop. Tainan workers in Cambodia threatened to strike in solidarity with the Salvadoran workers and workers in Indonesia also demonstrated their support. The coalition offered to help pay for machinery and technical support if Tainan agreed to embrace the union and give it a major role in the running of the factory. Additionally, activists pressured major clothing retailers like the Gap into committing to order clothes from the factory if it became unionized. Giving in to this combination of positive and negative incentives, Tainan re-hired the workers and agreed to gradually relinquish power over the plant as it made the transition to a genuinely worker-run cooperative. The re-born factory, jointly managed by Tainan, STIT, and several nonprofit organizations, was given the name Just Garments and was hailed as a major victory by the anti-sweatshop movement.

Yet almost from the beginning, Just Garments was besieged by problems. Lack of orders and an underdeveloped mechanical infrastructure prevented the factory from paying its workers living wages and slowed the transfer of power to the workers. Complaints by workers began to surface and before long there were reports that the company was refusing to acknowledge loans and investments from non-profits, unions and private donors—simply pocketing the money.

Chilean forest workers win strike

From Libcom.org

The Building and Wood Workers International reported on May 9 the end of the strike of more than 7,000 workers against Celulosa Arauco y Constitución SA – the largest forestry and pulp producing company in Chile.

The Chilean Confederación de Trabajadores Forestales, affiliated with the BWI, negotiated a raise in wages of 12 per cent for the highest earners and a 52 per cent rise for the lowest earners. All other demands had been met prior to the strike, which was called in response to the company's initial refusal to offer more than a 5 per cent raise.

A strike blockade was attacked by the police on May 3, leading to the death by gunfire of 26 year old Rodrigo Cisternas. BWI is calling for continued protests to the Chilean government in response to the violence.



A Just Garments worker sorts through piles of shirts.

in other factories. Workers are free to take restroom and water breaks and are given safety equipment.

"However, wages are only slightly higher than average (US\$5.15 per day as compared with the typical US\$5.00 per day) due to the financial crisis that Just Garments is facing. They are not receiving enough big orders

and they aren't set up to manufacture garments from start to finish so they are forced to rely on middlemen. They are currently trying to raise \$120,000 to build facilities that would let them run the entire process in-house."

As it turns out, lack of money was not the only problem. It now appears that Just Garments resorted to some of the same violations of workers rights practiced by the very sweatshops they claimed to be an alternative to.

An April 23 letter signed by numerous unions and social justice organizations from El Salvador, Mexico, and the

United States cited numerous charges of "mistreatment, sexual harassment, unjust firings, failure to pay severance pay as the Labor Code requires, or, in four cases, partial payment not in accordance with the law, and forced, unpaid overtime." Apparently, the company even appropriated deductions from workers' wages that were earmarked for Social Security and pension funds, a clear violation of Salvadoran law.

The Salvadoran labor movement is supporting the demands of locked out Just Garments workers. The signers of the aforementioned letter are insisting that the company pay full severance, vacation and bonus money, legal benefits and wages owed to the workers as well as all money illegally appropriated from pensions and Social Security funds. They are also calling for the repayment of all debt owed by Just Garments to non-profit organizations and the payment of additional money to sustain the workers as they search for new jobs.

The letter calls upon "all those people and organizations—especially in the United States—that have supported and contributed money to Just Garments to now support the workers in their just demands under Salvadoran law and the ethics of the organizations that promote just production."

The closure of Just Garments is almost certainly permanent; a tragic end to a project that many hoped would serve as a beacon of hope and inspiration for the world's beleaguered garment workers.

Latin American solidarity must be grassroots, not government-led

By Patrick Dunn

During the weekend of April 13-15, I represented the IWW's International Solidarity Commission at the Latin American Solidarity Conference (LASC) at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago, United States.

The theme of the conference was "Alternatives to Empire," a phrase that captures the inseparability of anti-imperial resistance and democratic creativity. People from all over Latin America and the world came together to help pave the way for a sane and participatory future.

The conference spirit was above all one of movement-building and collective education. Participants ranged from official representatives of the Venezuelan government to international fair trade activists to everyday workers and Chicago residents. All were gathered together to celebrate the burgeoning progressive forces that have swept through Latin America in recent years—in the domain of government but especially in the wider population—and to advance the growth of these forces by sowing the seeds of a lasting international solidarity. Everyone arrived in Chicago with a strong desire to engage in the kind of free and open association that is distinctive of a democratic culture, and the conversations that unfolded throughout the weekend revealed a common commitment to worker solidarity and intensive cross-border organizing.

Despite the recent surge of leftist victories in Latin American electoral politics, only a modest portion of the conference was explicitly concerned with developments in the state sector. This included a workshop directed by the Venezuelan Consulate General in Chicago, another workshop dealing with the current situation in Bolivia, and a third addressing more general questions about the possibility of an intergovernmental coalition that would encompass much of the Latin American region. Similarly, while their interaction was permeated with talk of Bolivarian takeovers of national offices, the majority of the conference organizers and participants seemed to identify much more closely with the

grassroots democratic projects gaining momentum on the ground in countries like Venezuela and Bolivia than with the central governmental agencies of those countries. The overall tendency was to express support for institutional bodies of government only to the extent that they have fostered the growth of popular structures for economic and political participation within their borders.

To its credit, the Venezuelan government took a stance that was fairly consonant with this vision of an autonomous,

If Latin American solidarity is going to serve as a remedy for barbaric class warfare and intimidation, it will have to emerge from the ground up.

participatory society. In their well-attended conference presentation, representatives of the Chavez administration highlighted the recent efforts to establish localized, self-determining communal councils, which have already begun to assume a significant share of responsibility for the management of public life within Venezuela. Chavez and his allies conceive of these social reforms as part of a "new geometry of power," which, if it can overcome its continuing dependence on state control and bureaucratic mediation, could become truly instrumental in transforming Venezuela into a society of democratic decision-making processes and worker-controlled production in the approaching decades.

In addition to these more localized initiatives, there was considerable discussion of the Bolivarian Alternative movement (ALBA) at the conference, and of other recent attempts by elected officials in Latin America to forge an alternative to the predatory capitalism that currently dominates the world economic system. As a strategic response to the so-called "free trade agreements," FTAA

and CAFTA, which are designed by the US government and its wealthy partners in international banking, the governing bodies of Bolivia, Cuba, Dominique, Ecuador, the Grenadines, Haiti, Nicaragua, St. Vincent, Uruguay, and Venezuela have formed an alliance that will serve as a global counter-power and a social-democratic antidote to "free trade." Rather than feeding the expansion of the IMF and World Bank and playing into the hands of imperial power, this bloc of nations has decided to take control of its own common destiny and establish trade solidarity within the Latin American region itself—a region that is extremely rich in natural resources despite the widespread economic devastation it has suffered during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

As this Bolivarian counterforce gains strength and influence, its socio-economic reforms will continue to have serious implications for the lives of workers not only in Latin America, but throughout the world. If the mood at the conference was any indication, there seems to be a growing consensus that the unification of socialist governments in Latin America will help workers to tighten their organizing networks and achieve greater control over the forces of production. Yet many workers in the region continue to face significant forms of adversity, as in Colombia, where union activities are systematically suppressed and organizers are disappeared.

If Latin American solidarity is going to serve as a remedy for this sort of barbaric class warfare and intimidation, it will have to emerge from the ground up—through direct action and communication among the workers themselves—rather than remaining transfixed at the level of state and other official institutions. Bolivarian social programs and economic reforms have the potential to furnish conditions under which a culture of democratic participation and labor solidarity will be able to thrive. But the creation and maintenance of such a culture will, as always, be the task of no one other than the workers themselves.

World Labor Solidarity

A COLUMN BY THE
INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

The IWW formed the International Solidarity Commission to help the union build the worker-to-worker solidarity that can lead to effective action against the bosses of the world. To contact the ISC, email solidarity@iww.org.

I-07: International Syndicalist Conference in Paris

The ISC authorized Fellow Workers Adam Lincoln (London), Elmar Stuhlfauth (Cologne), and Michael Ashbrook (Luxembourg) to represent the IWW at the International Syndicalist Conference (I-07), a global gathering of revolutionary unions that took place in Paris April 27-May 1st. The IWW representatives participated in the various workshops and discussions that took place in the conference, on topics ranging from "Telecoms and IT" to "Imperialism and Colonialism". The IWW also had substantial one on one dialogue with many of the unions in attendance, especially the FAU of Germany and the CNT-F of France. The FAU expressed its intention to work as partners with the IWW's German Language Area Members Regional Organizing Committee (GLAMROC). It also served to strengthen the IWW's pre-existing relationship with the CNT-F and lay the groundwork for future collaborations.

The IWW representatives presented the CNT-F with an IWW flag that they intend to use at solidarity demonstrations in support of the IWW Starbucks Workers Union. Another development that came out of this meeting was the creation of the I-07 Forum website <http://www.redblack.org/i07forum/> which, it is hoped, will help the unions that were present at the conference to stay in communication.

IWW plans delegation to Mexico

The IWW will be sending a delegation of members to northern Mexico this fall to meet with members of militant rank-and-file unions and grassroots non-governmental organizations. The 8-day trip is being organized through the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM), a dedicated anti-sweatshop organization. The ISC hopes this opportunity for the IWW to solidify its relationship with the Mexican labor movement. We are currently working to raise the necessary funds to make this delegation a success. The ISC is asking all IWW branches, individual members and supporters to contribute whatever they can to this important project. For more information or to make a contribution, email solidarity@iww.org. A call for applications to serve on the delegation will be coming soon.

Meeting the FORA in Argentina

ISC delegate Rhiannon Edwards of the Edmonton GMB is currently in Argentina following the Recuperated Factories movement. In April, FW Edwards made contact with the Federation of Regional Workers (FORA), Argentina's archo-syndicalist union and an affiliate of the global IWA-AIT federation. FW Edwards reports that the FORA is eager to establish a relationship with the IWW. Plans for a more formal meeting are in the works. FW Edwards has also been reporting on labor news from Argentina and has translated several solidarity letters into Spanish for the ISC.

Argentine police kill teacher

The International Solidarity Commission wrote a letter to the provincial governor of Neuquén to protest the April 5 killing of striking teacher Carlos Fuentealba by police during a peace-

ful blockade. The ISC also expressed its solidarity with the teachers union and everyone who participated in the general strike that swept Argentina following Fuentealba's death. The ISC demanded a full investigation into the killing, that the findings of the investigation be made immediately available to the public, and that all police officers involved in the incident be held accountable for their actions.

Solidarity with imprisoned Iranian unionist

The ISC sent a letter to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad demanding the immediate release of imprisoned union leader Mahmoud Salehi. Salehi, former President of the Bakery Workers' Association of the city of Saqez, was recently sentenced by an appeals court to one year in prison and a three-year suspended prison sentence on trumped up charges dating back to a 2004 May Day celebration. In the letter, the ISC protested the lack of due process that Salehi has received in this case. (He was taken into custody on April 9 by a security officer who claimed he just wanted to talk to Salehi about the upcoming 2007 May

Day events. Through this trickery the government prevented Salehi from contact a lawyer or even his family.) The ISC closed the letter by insisting that "Iran must prove its commitment to workers' rights" by reversing the sentence and setting Mahmoud Salehi free.

Demanding an Investigation into the Murder of FLOC Organizer

The International Solidarity Commission faxed a letter to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, urging the Human Rights Commission to launch an official investigation into the murder of Santiago Rafael Cruz, an organizer for the US-based Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) who was brutally beaten to death at a FLOC office in Monterrey, Mexico. The letter pointed out the serious implications this case has for organizers and human rights workers on both sides of the border and made it clear that the Human Rights Commission must take a leadership role in "put[ting] an end to the violence and impunity".

The ISC also wrote a letter to the

Mexican Ambassador to the United States, Arturo Sarukhan, demanding that the government of Mexico take this case seriously. There was no reply from the Ambassador himself but one of his underlings responded to acknowledge receipt of our letter, referring to the murder as an "unfortunate death".

Continued on 12



Photo by Ronny Stansert.
I-07 delegate Marta de Atenco, Mexico brandishes the symbol of her people's struggle, the machete at the International Syndicalist Conference in Paris.

IWW attends sweatfree conference

By Bret Grote, Pittsburgh IWW

Worker representatives from the apparel and agricultural industries, union organizers, community and religious groups, and fair trade companies converged on New York City April 27-29 for the Clean Clothes and Fair Food Conference to Promote Justice in Factories and Fields.

Organized by SweatFree Communities and the Alliance for Fair Food, the conference provided an opportunity for strategizing and movement building within the agricultural and apparel industry struggles against sweatshop exploitation in the corporate-driven economy.

This fourth annual conference of SweatFree Communities benefited substantially from organizing together with the Alliance for Fair Food, a network of human rights, religious, student, labor, and grassroots organizations who work in partnership with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW).

In April, the CIW turned McDonald's, winning wage increases and mechanisms to ensure transparency and an enforceable code of conduct for workers in the fields producing the company's tomatoes. This victory followed on the heels of a 2005 agreement with Taco Bell and their parent company Yum! Brands, that had been reached after a four-year boycott, demonstrating an impressive learning curve for the CIW and their allies. Burger King is next on the list, and conference participants staged a lively action at the Times Square Burger King on Saturday.

The IWW had a solid presence at the conference, with the Starbucks Workers Union participating in a workshop on corporate campaigning and speaking about the Justice from Bean to Cup campaign. Dave Temple, a New York City Wobbly who designed a Bread and Roses ESL curriculum, brought his students to the SweatFree Carnival on Saturday night. Kenneth Miller was the IWW's International Solidarity Committee representative.

On Sunday afternoon, a delegation from Pittsburgh's SweatFree Baseball campaign sat down with Kalpona Akter from the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity to strategize on how we could escalate pressure against the Pirates about worker abuses in their supply chain.

The Pittsburgh Sports and Exhibition Authority recently wrote a letter to the Pirates specifically asking them about conditions in factories sewing Haddad/Pirates apparel and advocating that our hometown team utilize the model of the Workers Rights Consortium for monitoring their supply chain. This request is unprecedented in the anti-sweatshop movement and provides an important piece of leverage for the SweatFree Baseball campaign.

Our ability to further press the Pirates to work with unions in Bangladesh to monitor factory conditions could not be more important right now.

Days before the conference a National Labor Committee report revealed that Just Garments, an allegedly worker-owned factory in El Salvador vetted by SweatFree Communities, had reverted to sweatshop conditions (see page 15 for the story).



Left to right: Kenneth Miller of the Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance and the IWW, the General Secretary of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity Kalpona Akter, and SweatFree Baseball campaign artist Tom Keough at the Clean Clothes and Fair Food Conference to Promote Justice in Factories and Fields conference.

This scandal threatens to cast doubt on any independent monitoring in the global apparel industry that is not conducted in coordination with a global apparel industry organizing drive. Bangladesh is unique in this respect in that unions are conducting industry-wide and regional organizing in the apparel industry.

The Pittsburgh IWW's Union Solidarity Night at PNC Park on April 14 was canceled due to a rainout. We will be rescheduling soon so that we can deliver international solidarity and compel the Pirates to launch a factory investigation that can serve as an industry-wide model.